MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH 50c PDC

A REASON TO DIE

THE NEW

MIKE SHAYNE

Short Novel by

BRETT HALLIDAY

ROBERT DEVANEY

WALTER SNOW

JOHN JAKES

NORMAN DANIELS

MICHAEL AVALLONE

24 ISSUES FOR ONLY $8

For a Two Year Subscription To

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

WE TAKE CONSIDERABLE pride in the variety and range of *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine's* contents. Our aim has been to bring you, every month, the work of both outstandingly gifted, nationally famous writers, and truly brilliant newcomers. And, of course, there's always a brand new and especially written Mike Shayne story in every issue. So, subscribe NOW. The subscription price is $6.00 per year for 12 issues—$12.00 for two years for 24 issues. But—by filling in the conveniently placed coupon below you will receive a two year subscription—24 issues—for only $8.00; a saving of $4.00. Add $1.00 extra for foreign postage.

WE DECIDED ON this unusual bargain subscription offer because so many readers keep telling us it's difficult to locate their favorite magazine on the present over-crowded newsstands. Subscribe immediately—and you won't have to go searching for Mike Shayne. He'll come to you 24 consecutive months with a new complete, dramatically suspenseful adventure.

REMEMBER: More than 35,000,000 copies of the amazing redhead's paperback books have been sold to date. And the Mike Shayne stories you read in our magazine appear there first, and in many instances are never reprinted in paperbacks or in any other form. You *may* miss some of Mike's most interesting capers altogether if you don't read *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*.

SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . RE-SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . for the biggest bargain of your crime-reading life. Two years—24 issues—yours for only $8.00: in United States currency, please. Remit additional dollar ($1.00) for Canada, Mexico, Pan American countries and all foreign countries.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
56 West 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036

Kindly enter my subscription to **MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** for two years (24 issues) @ $8.00. Add $1.00 for foreign postage.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, STATE, ZIP NO. .....

Please print **March—203**

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1967 Vol. 20, No. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

A REASON TO DIE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

He was a man without an enemy in the world—yet for this he had to die! And anyone who should dare to seek the reason was marked for death as well! No man wanted to take the case of the mild little artist who had painted his own grave! until Mike Shane promised a weeping woman he would take the job—even though it meant getting into a deadly game of hide and seek with an assassin's bullets.

. . . . . 2 to 53

A NEW EXCITING NOVELET

THE BOY WITH THE LONG BLOND HAIR
DAVID MUTCH 64

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director

HOLMES TAYLOR
Associate Editor

SIX NEW SHORT STORIES

CREAMPUFF
JOHN JAKES 54

ALL IS FORGIVEN
WALTER SNOW 90

THE TIN SWORD
NORMAN DANIELS 102

CORPSES ARE FOR KILLING
MICHAEL AVALLONE 118

EXCEPT WHEN X IS VARIABLE
ROBERT DEVANEY 126

BUYER'S MARKET
H. C. NEAL 136

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 20, No. 4. March, 1967. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. 56 W. 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) $6.00; Two Years (24 issues) $12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious.

© 1967, by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

Postmaster—return 3579 to 56 W. 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036

A Reason to Die

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MIKE SHAYNE came into his office tired and hot from the long stakeout. But the vigil had been a success; he had spotted his man, a fugitive from Continental Insurance's bunco men, and turned him over to the police. So Shayne was all smiles when his brown-eyed secretary greeted him.

"Tired, Michael?" the pert young woman said.

"Tired, but successful, Angel," Shayne said. "Type up a report for Continental. Tell them the police have Antek. They can get extradition any time."

"That was quick," Lucy said.

"It's all in knowing the criminal mind," Shayne said with a grin. He strode to the door into his private office. "Now I'm going to have a drink, a shave, and close up early for a quiet night at home."

But Mike Shayne, as usual, was wrong.

He strode on into his office, tossed his panama onto the hat-rack, sat at his desk, and took out a bottle of Martel. He put his big feet up on the desk, poured three fingers of the amber and aromatic cognac, ran his big fingers through his shock of unruly red hair, and drank with a sigh of appreciation.

Outside his high window in the Flagler Building the late after-

© 1967, by Brett Halliday

Silent death stalked Mike Shayne as he fought the grim riddle of the man who had no foes—yet had to be murdered . . .

noon sun of Miami was setting behind the city. It was that time of day when, his work well done, Shayne felt the most peaceful—too late to do more work, too early to face the crush of humanity called the rush-hour. A time to sit and think with a good cognac. Peace.

At that point, the telephone rang.

Shayne stared at the black instrument with distaste. It did not ring again, and he waited to see what Lucy would do. What Lucy did was buzz his inter-office signal.

Shayne sighed. Lucy would have handled it if it were not important. Shayne flipped his inter-com switch.

"Yes, Angel?"

"Tim Rourke, Michael," Lucy's voice said. "He sounds in trouble."

Shayne picked up the receiver. "Yes, Tim. What's up?"

Tim Rourke's voice was tense. One of Shayne's oldest friends, the cadaverous reporter for the *Miami Daily News* spoke rapidly and urgently.

"I've got a favor to ask, Mike."

"Ask, Tim," Shayne said. "You know the answer."

"Wait until you get it, Mike. It's not so easy," Rourke said from the far end of the line. "We've got a man in the composing room down here, old Mack Bednar. I've known old Mack a long time. He just came to me a little while ago. His brother-in-law has been killed!"

"Killed?" Shayne said.

"Murdered, Mike," Rourke said. "Shot in cold blood. No witness, no reason."

"There's always a reason, Tim," Shayne said.

"I know, Mike; that's why I want you to help. The wife is Mack Bednar's sister, a lot younger than Mack but no kid. I mean, the sister is like forty, and her husband, the one who was shot, was maybe fifty. Mack says his sister can't think of one reason. No enemies, no motive, no troubles."

"Come on, Tim," Shayne said and drank another finger of the good cognac.

"I know, Mike. I said the same. But Mack swears he agrees with his sister. He says her husband was a real quiet man, no business troubles, no girl troubles, didn't drink or gamble. Mack says he's known the dead man twenty years and can't think of a motive either!"

Shayne was silent. A man without troubles, vices or enemies was hard to find. But he had heard of such cases. They were always difficult.

The big red-head sighed. Tim Rourke was a friend.

"What do you think, Tim?"

"I believe what old Mack tells me," Rourke said from the distant office of the *Daily News*.

"Okay," Shayne said. "What do I do?"

"Take the case, try to find out what happened. Mack's sister just has to know. I guess she can't real-

ly believe it. Knowing might help her. They can't pay a lot, but enough."

"All right, Tim," Shayne said, mentally waving good-by to his quiet evening. "Give me the details."

"There's little to tell, Mike. He was in his office late last night and someone shot him through the window from the alley. No one heard the shot. His two associates were there, but in another room."

Shayne laughed. "Start at the beginning, Tim. What is the name? What was his work?"

"Sorry, Mike. I'm a little shook up. Old Mack is taking this very hard," Rourke's voice said. "Well, the dead man was Karl Mundt. He was an art dealer. Not a big one—just a small gallery here, and two associates who work on commission largely. His wife, Mack's sister, is Frieda Mundt. She's a nice woman with grey hair and a little more weight than she should have. They had no children.

"According to Mack, Karl Mundt didn't gross more than ten thousand a year. His net was just about enough for them to live on. They didn't seem to mind; they are simple people. Karl never had a bad habit in his life that anyone seems to know. He worked hard, enjoyed his work, and every year they took a quiet vacation together.

"Last night he was working late, as he usually did because he liked his work and it took long hours to make a living. His two associates, Fern Stickler and Paul Coleman, were working in the next room. The door to Mundt's office was closed. They heard nothing. But when they went in Mundt was dead; the window glass was broken."

Rourke stopped. Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe as he held the phone in his other hand.

"They were in the next room and heard nothing?" Shayne said.

"The police are sure he used a silencer—the killer, I mean," Rourke said.

"What have the police come up with?"

"Nothing that they've told me, Mike."

"Who's on the case?" Shayne asked.

"Lieutenant Bellow," Rourke said.

Shayne felt a little better. George Bellow was a good cop, and Shayne got along well with him. The first order of business seemed to be a visit to Bellow. Shayne looked at his watch. There was probably plenty of time to catch the lieutenant. He sighed wearily again. This did not look like a case he was going to enjoy.

"Okay, Tim," the red-head said. "I'll talk to Bellow, and give me the address of the widow. Also the address of the late Mr. Mundt's business."

Rourke obliged, and the lean reporter hung up. Shayne sat back

in his swivel chair, looked morosely at his feet, and finished the cognac. He swiveled around and looked out the window at the late afternoon sun.

Tim Rourke rarely made a mistake about people. If Tim said that this Karl Mundt had no enemies and no troubles, then Tim believed that and Shayne wanted to believe Tim.

But Karl Mundt was dead—shot through a window from an alley but someone who used a silencer and, therefore, had come prepared to do what he had done.

There had to be a reason.

Shayne stood up and strode to the hatrack for his panama. Maybe this case would not be so uninteresting after all. He wanted to know a lot more about the late Karl Mundt.

II

LIEUTENANT GEORGE BELLOW was a short, stocky man who rarely smiled and equally rarely scowled. A man of even temper, Bellow sat now behind his desk in the dim office shut away from the sun and shrugged.

"It's a tough one, Mike," Bellow admitted. "We've got just about zero to go on."

"Maybe you better give me the whole story as you know it, George," Shayne said.

Bellow shrugged again. "Why not? I'll take any help I can find on this one. Where do you want to start?"

"With the shooting."

"Okay. One shot in the back of the head. He was working at his desk. Never saw his killer, from what we can tell. Gun was a thirty-eight, probably a long-barrelled target type, with a silencer. Died just about instantly according to the medical examiner. Body found maybe an hour after death, no more."

"Who found it?"

"His two associates, together! The Stickler woman says they both went in to say good night to Mundt and found him. Coleman called us right away."

"What about the alley?" Shayne said.

Bellow sighed. "Nothing. It's a paved alley, dark as sin. No footprints, no tires marks, nothing dropped that we could connect to the case, no fingerprints on window or sill except a few hundred smudges."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing," Bellow said. "The killer never came into the office, Mike. He never got close to Mundt or the room. What clues could he leave? No, this one is the hard kind and we've got to solve it the hard way."

Shayne nodded slowly. The hard way. Which meant motive and opportunity. It meant a lot of long, slow work to find a killer with the motive and the opportu-

nity and, once that was known, then trying to get the proof necessary for a conviction. Bellow shook his head grimly.

"I hate to say it, Mike, but this is the kind of case that ends up in the *open and unsolved* file at least fifty per cent of the time, and you know it."

"I know, George," Shayne agreed, "but I promised Rourke and the widow. What have you come up with so far?"

Bellow swiveled around and took out a file folder that was already growing fat. The lieutenant hefted it for a long minute.

"We've been on it two days and look at it already," Bellow said slamming the file down on his desk. "I've seen this kind of case in the unsolved file, Mike—two feet thick, with the work of a hundred cops that added up to zero!"

"Let's see if we can keep this one thinner," Shayne said.

Bellow opened the file. "Here it is. We've checked just about everyone who ever knew him in Miami, and they all say he had no enemies at all. None of them can come up with a motive. Our men have gone over his books with a vacuum cleaner. He was in good shape, not rich and not poor and no troubles at all.

"The people he sold art to all swear by him. His reputation in the field was perfect. Good, honest Karl Mundt, not brilliant and not dumb. His wife can't think of any

personal problems at all, at least she says she can't. We're checking deeper, but I'm damned if it looks like any kind of passion crime, Mike."

"No, it doesn't," Shayne said. "It looks like a grudge killing, or a business deal. You're sure he wasn't in any kind of business trouble? Debts? Some shady deal?"

"We're still digging, Mike, but nothing so far."

"There has to be something."

"Sure," Bellow said. "We know he had some trouble, but so far we can't find it, and no one else seems to know about it. I tell you, Mike, this one is a hard nut."

Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin in the dim and silent office. The redhead did not like this one bit, but the choices were simple.

"Either somone is lying now," Shayne said, "or Mundt had some part of his life hidden from everyone."

"Take your choice," Bellow said.

"Yeh," Shayne said. "It's not much of a choice. But he was shot, George. Someone didn't like him."

Shayne left the lieutenant brooding over his problems. Shayne sympathized with Bellow. This was the kind of case a policeman hated—difficult, tedious, and almost certainly without credit to the policeman whether he solved it or not. If he solved it there would be little notice of his efforts for such a colorless murder. If he did not solve it, that would be remembered.

Still feeling a little sorry for Bellow, Shayne reached the street and his car. It was well after five o'clock now, and the red-head was hungry, but he decided to talk to the widow first. He drove out to the small house in the quiet residential section.

Mrs. Frieda Mundt was at home. She was a heavyish woman of forty-plus, and her face was pale and swollen.

"Come in, Mr. Shayne," Frieda Mundt said. "My brother told me you were taking the case. I thank you."

Shayne went in. It was obvious that the widow had been crying most of the day, and yet that she also had not really come to believe the death of her man.

"I'll do what I can, Mrs. Mundt," Shayne said.

The living room of the house was middle-class, comfortable, a little fussy. The nap of the sofa was worn. Not worn out, but on the edge. The room was well cared for. It all spoke of not too much money but a lot of use and care.

Shayne sat down on the sofa and faced the widow, who dabbed at her reddened eyes.

"I've just come from the police, Mrs. Mundt. What they tell me makes your husband almost too good to believe," Shayne said bluntly.

"He was too good to believe, Mr. Shayne," Frieda Mundt said. "He was a very rare man these days—good, kind, strong, and happy with his life. That made me a rare woman for our time. I was content to be his woman; I was happy. Now—"

Shayne waited for the woman to gather herself together again. Frieda Mundt did not actually cry. She only began to cry, and then stopped herself, her eyes suddenly hard.

"I must know why Karl was killed," the woman said. Her eyes were fixed on Shayne. "You understand? I must *know!* I have to understand! Then, perhaps, I can forget. I have to know that there was a reason. You understand, Mr. Shayne? I must know that he died for a reason—some reason, any reason! There must be, somewhere, that reason. I could not face anything else."

Shayne nodded slowly. The woman's eyes were bright in her swollen and yet drawn face. The

eyes were unnaturally bright. She was either telling the truth, and she did not know of any reason for Karl Mundt to be murdered, or she was a marvelous actress.

"All right, Mrs. Mundt, I'll take the case and I'll take your word for there being no reason that you know now," Shayne said quietly. "But there has to be a reason. Someone wanted your husband dead. Someone went to a lot of trouble to kill him. Somone knew he would be there in his office, and knew about the alley."

Frieda Mundt nodded. "But—perhaps some maniac, Mr. Shayne? A crazy man who killed just anyone? That is what is driving me to distraction! Was my Karl's death nothing but a horrible joke? The chance of him being there to be seen through that window and killed for no reason?"

"Perhaps," Shayne agreed. "But I doubt it. The pattern is wrong for that kind of killing. Too simple. Maniacs don't usually shoot once through windows; they don't kill one man and vanish, and they don't use silencers."

"A mistake, then? The wrong man?" the distraught woman said.

Shayne shrugged. "That's more possible. But again I doubt it. I'll have to check out that alley and see what kind of mistake could have been made. But I don't think it was any kind of mistake, Mrs. Mundt. No, it smells of murder, pure and straight, and for that there has to be a reason. Now, you're sure he had no business troubles?"

"None, Mr. Shayne," Frieda Mundt said. "Look around you. We live—lived simply. We are not rich, but we are not poor, and we needed little. We only had each other. We needed nothing more; we wanted for nothing we did not have. Karl was a man who loved the quiet life. We took a long vacation each year. Karl loved the wild places on the sea. He liked to just walk, look at life."

"What about his two associates?" Shayne said. The detective was trying to be as simple and businesslike as possible. Mrs. Mundt was on the edge of breaking down every second as every word that she said made her think of her loss, of the seemingly senseless tragedy.

"What about them, Mr. Shayne?"

"Did they have any reason to kill him? Were they trying to take over? Did either of them need money? Do they gain from his death?"

The woman blinked. "Gain? Fern and Paul? Why, no, unless you consider the business a gain. I mean, I imagine they will take over the operation of Karl's gallery. Of course, I own it still. That won't change."

"Had they been having any trouble about how to run the business?"

"Not that I know."

"Does either of them need quick money? Maybe they gain some cash with Mr. Mundt dead."

"They don't gain, Mr. Shayne, and I don't know why either of them would need money," Frieda Mundt said.

"All right," Shayne said, "how about Karl himself? Did he have any personal problems? Gambling? Drink?"

"No!" the woman almost shouted. "Why do they all ask that? You, my brother, the police! What is wrong with all of you that you must always think the worst of a dead man?"

"Easy," Shayne said. "Mrs. Mundt, maybe we've all dealt with too many murders, too much crime. We see rot everywhere. Maybe we see too much rottenness."

"Then look at good for a moment!" the woman snapped.

"I'll try," Shayne said drily. "But first, one more question that you won't like. Did Karl and you have a truly happy married life? I guess you know what I mean."

The woman paled and reddened at the same time. "Karl and I were in love. Real love, Mr. Shayne. Real love does not depend on what you mean."

"That depends on who you are, Mrs. Mundt," Shayne said bluntly. "Real love very often depends on passion, and don't think it doesn't. In many ways, love without passion is like a dead horse, Mrs. Mundt—it's nothing, hollow. But I'll ask the big question. Were there any other women?"

"No," Frieda Mundt said quietly.

"Are you sure?" Shayne said.

"Yes, I—" the woman stopped. "No, of course I'm not sure, if by sure you mean did I know where Karl was every second of the day or night. No, I did not know for sure. I did not police my husband."

"Did he police you?" Shayne said harshly.

For a long minute the woman stared at Shayne. She bent her head and looked at her hands as if studying herself. Then, for the first time, she smiled.

"I'll accept that as a compliment, Mr. Shayne," she said. "No, he had no need to police me. I'm not a young and pretty woman, Mr. Shayne. I have no great needs in that direction."

"You're a woman," Shayne said bluntly. "I've never noticed that youth and beauty are necessary, Mrs. Mundt. Believe me, half the straying wives in the world are not so young and far from beauty contest winners. And as for passion, well—"

"Spare me, Mr. Shayne. I tell you that Karl had no cause for jealousy, and no other man had any reason to kill Karl for my sake. Of course, you are free to look. I have hired you to find out who killed Karl and why. You have to do your job in your own way."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

The red-head left her staring at the floor in the silent living room where even Shayne could feel that something very important was missing. Karl Mundt had left a great hole in the room, and in the life of the widow. Unless she was a remarkable actress.

Shayne did not rule this out. He had seen a lot of fine acting in his days as a detective. Now, out in his car again, he was still hungry. But so far he was no farther along than when he had started. He wanted to learn something before he ate. He decided that the two associates, and the alley, were next.

He decided on the alley first. Perhaps the scene of the crime would tell him something.

III

THE MUNDT GALLERY was a small, store-front establishment on a quiet side street in downtown Miami. Mike Shayne parked across from it and considered the place. It was dark and silent now as the last light of the day faded over Miami into a purple twilight.

Shayne lit a cigarette. The Mundt Gallery was a far cry from the plush tourist-trap type galleries of the better streets of the city, and of gaudy Miami Beach across Biscayne Bay. Shayne could see various objects in the window: some paintings, statues, daggers, many *objets d'art.*

The gallery did not have the appearance of a rich enterprise. It also appeared to be highly eclectic —art pieces from almost any and every period Karl Mundt had happened to pick up. Even Shayne's untrained eye could observe that Karl Mundt had not been exactly a great judge of art. Most of the material in the window was fairly ordinary.

Shayne got out of his car and crossed the quiet street. He stood for a time looking in at the window. The shop inside was fairly small, but the building went back quite a way, indicating considerable space in the rear. Shayne could see that no casual observer could have told whether or not anyone was in the back rooms.

He turned away and walked around the block to the paved alley that ran between the buildings on

this block and the ones on the next. It was a fairly wide alley, but shadowed by the buildings around it so that, even now at twilight, it was dark.

At full night it would be completely dark, and a man would be almost invisible.

Shayne walked slowly up the alley. He studied the rear of all the buildings on both sides. Almost all of them had windows—but the windows were covered! There were only three windows that could be seen through. One was a store room of a hardware store. The second was nothing but the back of a garage. The third was the office of Karl Mundt.

There were two windows in the office of Karl Mundt. The one on the left had a view of the door and the left side of the small office. The window on the right was directly behind the desk. This was the broken window.

Mike Shayne stood directly outside it and saw that a man sitting at the desk would have the back of his head no more than four feet from the window!

There was little doubt exactly how the killing had been done. The killer had stood just outside the window in the pitch dark of the alley. Mundt's head was right in front of him where the dead man had been bent over the work on his desk. At that range almost no one could have missed with the first shot. The killer had shot, with the silencer on the gun, and walked way.

The killer had probably waited for a noise, any noise. A backfire in the street. A horn blown somewhere. A truck passing at the mouth of the alley. A crash of garbage cans. Almost any sound would cover the sound of a silenced shot from people in another room.

The killer would have simply walked away. No need to run. Walk quietly along the alley and, when no one was there to see, out into the street. A car would have been waiting, and that would have been that.

Shayne turned his attention to the ground around the window. Bellow had been right. There could be no marks on the paved alley. The rough and weathered wood of the window sill would yield no fingerprints.

Shayne bent down and studied the ground. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled over the pavement for twenty feet in all directions. He found nothing, not even a burned match.

He stood up and brushed off his trousers. He again looked in the window. The office of the murdered man was small and fairly austere. There was the desk in front of the window, a wooden swivel desk chair, and two other straight chairs for visitors. There was a shabby but comfortable looking couch, and a deep leather arm chair. A long table, presumably to

hold brochures and such, and four steel filing cabinets completed the furnishings.

A door led out of the room to the left, and another to the right. There was no evidence of any secretary sharing the office with Mundt. And there was not much point to studying the contents of those files; Bellow and his men would have combed them with a microscope. But Shayne wanted to take a look inside the office anyway.

The layout of the other rooms could be important.

He could get the keys, but he had already spent the best part of a good night on this dead-end of a case. So he fetched his key ring from his pocket and went to work on the back door. It was a tin lock and opened smoothly on the second try. Shayne stepped into a dark and narrow hallway.

The red-head moved silently but quickly down the short hall to a door. He went through the door into a dark room. He reached for the light—and heard the faint sound.

Mike Shayne whirled.

The light blazed on and half-blinded him.

It was the light of a desk lamp, not the overhead light, and the lamp had been turned with its shade up so that the glare was directly in Shayne's eyes. The red-head covered his eyes with his left hand and his right went quickly toward his shoulder holster and the big .45 that hung inside his coat.

"Don't move!" a voice snapped.

Mike Shayne froze.

"Turn around, quickly!"

The voice had a faintly tremulous sound. As if it belonged to a man trying to be harder than he was. Yet the set-up, and it was an obvious set-up he had walked right into like any punk amateur, had a certain touch of professionalism to it.

Shayne turned his back to the light.

He heard heavy footsteps behind him, and braced for the expected blow to the head. There was no blow. Instead, the man stopped behind him. Then a gun was pressed into his back. A flabby pale hand came around and reached into his jacket and took out his automatic. Then The gun barrel went away from his back.

"Turn around now," the voice said.

Shayne turned to face a small, heavy man. The man held a Luger.

"Sit down there," the man said and waved his Luger to a straight chair. "And don't move!"

Shayne sat down. The short man wore a shabby suit of a simple mass-produced cut. Shayne watched him. The man was sweating and the hand that held the Luger shook faintly. But there was an air of excitement, almost eagerness about the stocky character.

"I won't hesitate to shoot, re-

member that," the man said. "I've got all the right."

Shayne narrowed his grey eyes. The man's voice when he said these words had all the sound of a man trying to be menacing, and yet not sure. A man trying to convince himself that he would do what he said.

"Just stay right there while I call," the man went on.

Shayne watched him. The telephone was on the desk beside the glaring light. But Shayne was no longer seated where the light shined directly at him. He saw that he was in another small office. The man held the Luger as steady as he could and began to dial.

Shayne tensed. His grey eyes watched the Luger. The way the man's hand shook made him worry as much that it would go off by accident as by intent. And the man found it hard to dial, hold the pistol, and watch Shayne.

The dial slipped. The man swore, pressed down the cradle bar of the telephone, and began to dial again with the same hand that held the receiver. He took his eyes from Shayne and the Luger wavered.

Mike Shayne jumped.

The man dropped the phone and tried to aim the Luger at the advancing Shayne. The red-head reached the man in a single lunge. His massive fist hit the short man on the point of the chin. The man seemed to jump backward with a smile and collapsed in a soundless heap, the Luger skittering away across the floor of the office.

Shayne bent and retrieved the Luger and put it into his pocket. Then he searched the fallen man. He found a wallet, keys, twenty-two dollars, a pocket watch, and a brochure of a forthcoming auction of art objects. It was not what he had expected.

The wallet told him the story.

The short, heavy man was Paul Coleman, art dealer, age forty-seven, single, and the associate of Karl Mundt in the Mundt Gallery. Shayne took out the Luger and checked it. The gun was loaded, but it did not look like it had been fired for a long time. Shayne grinned when he saw that the safety was on!

He went and lifted the unconscious man and carried him to the couch. This office was furnished in almost the identical style as the office of Mundt, except that it was smaller and had only one filing cabinet, and it did not have an open window! In fact, it had no windows at all.

Shayne sat down and lighted a cigarette and studied the man on the couch. Coleman was no more prepossessing than Mundt must have been. Shayne had to admit that Coleman did not look like the part of a killer for gain or any other reason.

Still, Mike Shayne had seen a lot of cases. He recalled a case of murder for passion in which the

victim had been a man of sixty, the wife had been fifty-two and ugly, and the lover-killer had been a balding little paunchy man of sixty-three.

Paul Coleman groaned. The short man began to stir on the couch. Then his eyes opened. He blinked once, twice, and sat bolt upright. Fear was all over his flabby face as he saw Mike Shayne.

"Don't—don't kill me! Please, I—"

Shayne stared at the stammering man. Fear was deep in the eyes of Paul Coleman.

IV

"NO ONE'S going to kill you, Coleman," Mike Shayne said quietly.

Paul Coleman blinked again and shook his head to clear the fog from his brain. Shayne realized almost instantly now what Coleman had thought.

"You thought the killer had come back?"

Coleman's eyes were wide. "Who—who are you?"

"I'm not the killer, Coleman," Shayne said drily.

Coleman sat up, his head in his hands. "But you broke in. I heard you! And you have a gun! I thought you were the man who killed Karl and had come back. I was afraid, but I had to try to capture you and—"

"Call the police?" Shayne said.

LUCY HAMILTON

He should have guessed. The man had obviously been no professional gunman. "Sorry, then. I could have just told you. But you didn't give me much chance, did you? It's risky to point pistols at people."

Coleman shook his head. Then the short man seemed to regain some of the kind of courage that had made him try to tackle a man he thought was a cold-blooded killer. Shayne smiled. Coleman was a peppery little man for a middle-aged art dealer.

"You carry a gun and you broke in! Just who do you think you are?

I saw you skulking around the alley!"

"The name is Shayne, Coleman," Shayne said. "Mike Shayne. I'm a private investigator hired by Frieda Mundt to try to find out who killed Karl."

Coleman blinked. "A private detective? I—"

Shayne handed the small man his credentials. Coleman looked at them as if not quite sure they told him anything at all about Shayne. Then the short man began to nod.

"I was just looking around, checking the scene. I didn't know that anyone was here."

The red-head stopped and rubbed his gaunt jaw. "You know, you can't see any light from in here when you're in that alley. In fact, you couldn't tell that anyone else was in the gallery."

"Meaning?" Coleman said. The short man handed Shayne the credentials back.

"Meaning our killer could have thought the gallery was empty," Shayne said. "But also meaning that it would have been easy for someone to slip out of this office, say, kill Mundt and return without anyone else knowing he had gone."

"If you mean me, Shayne," Coleman said testily, "as I already told the police, Fern and I were working together the whole night. We went in to talk to Karl together. We found him dead—together!"

Shayne nodded. "So they tell me," the detective said mildly. "Let's take a look at where you were with Fern that night—or were you in this office?"

Coleman smiled for the first time. "Are you being a good detective, Mr. Shayne? I'm sure you've guessed that this office is adjacent to Karl's office. Through that door, as a matter of fact."

Shayne nodded. "I guessed, and I imagine you can hear pretty well what happens in that office?"

"Actually, not too well. This is an old building, rather solid. On top of that the acoustics are such that sound carries poorly from office to office. You can check that if you like. But, as it happens, high sounds carry well enough, and had I been in this office I am certain I would have heard the glass break at least."

"So you weren't in this office?" Shayne said.

"No, Mr. Shayne, I wasn't," Coleman said.

Shayne nodded again and looked around Coleman's office.

"Let me get the layout," the detective said, "it's kind of odd. The hallway leads from the rear door directly into this office."

"Right," Coleman said. The short, heavy man had recovered from both his fears, his suspicions and his moment of bravery. He was sitting back on the couch now, seemingly at his ease.

"Then that door on the right leads straight into Mundt's office?"

"Right again," Coleman said.

Shayne looked at the third door in Coleman's office. "And that one leads out into the gallery?"

"Eventually, yes," Coleman said, "but not directly. Why don't you take a look?"

"Let's go," Shayne said.

He let the heavy little man lead the way. The door proved to open into another dim hallway. The hall ran both left and right of the door. The red-head turned to Coleman. Coleman led the way to the right.

"This door is into Mundt's office," Coleman said, opening the door to reveal the office Shayne had seen from the alley, "and this door leads into Fern's office," Colemen went on opening the last door in the hallway to reveal another office almost exactly like the first two, and also without windows.

"You see," Coleman explained. "This was all one big storeroom once, and there were only the two windows. Karl had it made into three offices. We always intended to cut windows, but we never got around to it. Fern and I are rarely in the gallery, and Karl was almost always here. The windows just never came up."

"I see that Fern's office is just as close to Mundt's office as yours," Shayne said.

"Patience," Coleman said. The fat little man led the way back the corridor. He stopped again and opened a door in the outer wall. It opened into the main floor of the small gallery.

"Your offices take up more room than the gallery," Shayne said. "How come?"

"That's our business," Coleman said. "Karl always liked browsers, and insisted on an actual gallery floor, but most of our business is done with people who know us and shop mostly from our monthly catalogue. We don't even keep a large inventory; we locate items and secure the right to sell them. Then we find customers without bringing the actual pieces here, you see?"

"All right," Shayne said, "now what about the rabbit?"

Coleman frowned. "Rabbit?"

"The one you're going to pull out of your sleeve. You've given me the preliminary tour. Where's the socko finish?"

Coleman laughed. "Follow me."

The fat little man led Shayne on along the hall to a last door at the far end on the other side of his own office. He opened the door and bowed Shayne through. Shayne found himself in a large room that ran all the way from the alley in the rear to nearly the street in the front. It was narrow, and it had no windows. It was piled with crates and uncrated art pieces of all kinds.

It also contained a long table with drawing equipment, T-squares, rubber cement, pencils, papers and many sheets of paper of the kind used for dummying pages to be printed. Coleman point-

ed to the table and the layout equipment.

"This is where Fern and myself were that night, Shayne," Coleman said. "It was the last night of dummying the monthly catalogue. That was why we were all here that night. Karl was supposed to help us. When he was almost an hour late, we went into his office to see what was keeping him. That was when we found him."

Shayne looked slowly around the long, narrow room. The table was at the far end from the door. There were two rooms between the table and Karl Mundt's office. Traffic could be heard on the street. Shayne nodded slowly. It was possible, even probable, that a silenced shot and breaking glass would not be heard here.

"On top of that," Coleman said as if reading Shayne's mind, "we were damned busy. Have you ever done layout on a book or magazine, dummied an issue? Well let me tell you that it's the kind of work you concentrate on, believe me. I've had times when I didn't even hear the telephone!"

Shayne watched the small man. It was a pretty good alibi. Just about air-tight—except that no one could really prove it!

"It's good," Shayne said, "unless you and Fern are in it together, Coleman."

"True, we could be covering each other," Coleman agreed, "but then you'd have to find a motive. There isn't any. Besides, it would be pretty stupid of us to do it so openly when we had only each other as alibis."

"Murderers are usually stupid," Shayne said, "or they wouldn't murder. Let's kick the motive bit around for a while."

Coleman sat down on the edge of the table with the layout equipment on it. "There isn't a motive, Shayne. Fern, Karl and I are a trio of small-time dealers. Fern and I work on straight commission. Karl gives us the offices and the catalogue free, and for that he takes his share of the sale. We get our commissions per sale, and they are good commissions.

"With Karl gone not a thing will change except that maybe Fern and I will work harder. Or maybe Frieda will have to sell the business. Neither Fern nor I have the money to buy it. All we can hope for is the same deal with some new owner. Oh, Frieda might make a new deal, up our commissions because she isn't actually working in the business, but I'm not sure of that.

"I doubt if Frieda has any idea herself what she'll do. So why would we kill Karl for such a nebulous reason? And I don't think you will find that either Fern or I were stealing from the gallery, if you had that in mind. We're pretty sane people, Shayne; we just don't murder."

Shayne rubbed his chin. Cole-

man was, of course, almost certainly right. So far neither he nor the police had been able to come out with the faintest hint of a business motive. But then, something Coleman had said gave him a thought.

Shayne tugged slowly on his earlobe. "What if one of you made a real find, Coleman?"

Coleman frowned. "A find?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "Something really valuable, really big. Maybe you wouldn't want to share it?"

"Possible," Coleman admitted. "But why kill Karl? All we would have to do was walk out."

"What if it was Karl who found the item?" Shayne said softly.

Coleman said nothing. Not for a long thirty seconds. The short man just sat there on the edge of the table and looked at Mike Shayne. Then Coleman nodded very slowly.

"You have a busy mind, Shayne. I suppose you've seen too many murders, too much crime. I admit that maybe you've found the only motive either Fern or I could have. It isn't true, but it isn't something a man can deny, is it? I mean, it's something you have to search and search for. You won't find it, but you won't know that until you look."

"No," Shayne said, realizing the logic of the man. True or false, it was an accusation Paul Coleman could only deny, and he, Shayne, would never know if it were a lie or the truth until he had looked and looked and not found.

"I can swear to you that as far as I know Karl never made a big find in his life," Coleman said. "The only big thing he ever had happen was selling four of his paintings this year, and his paintings are nothing big."

"He painted himself?" Shayne said. "Frieda never—"

Coleman laughed. "An amateur, Shayne. A Sunday painter and a bad one. Not that he kidded himself. No, it was just a hobby. He's been painting for years. Straight realistic stuff mostly, but a little non-objective lately. He played games, Shayne. Most of us do. I sculp a little. Fern draws.

"Hobbies. Karl painted most Sundays he wasn't working, always took his paints and canvas on his vacations. He really liked a seascape. They were competent, that's all. That's why he was so pleased when he sold some. He was happy as a boy in a sand box when he sold one.

"I see your eyes, but forget it. Fifty dollars tops, that was what he asked. Usually he got ten, maybe twenty. No, the only unusual thing about Karl's painting was that he actually sold four this year—all in the last few weeks, too. Fifty bucks each. I remember he was specially pleased because he figured the extra $200 would get him and Frieda to Bermuda this year."

Mike Shayne sighed. The more

he asked, the more Karl Mundt came out a nice man with no reason to be killed. A quiet business, a quiet wife, and now a quiet hobby. Painting—not horses, or women, or booze. It was discouraging. No wonder Bellow was already seeing visions of the open and unsolved file.

Close to the perfect murder, that was the way it was shaping up. A simple shot through a window, unseen and unheard. And no motive. No suspects and no reason, or a totally hidden one. There had to be a reason, but maybe they would never know if it had gone to the grave with Karl Mundt.

Mike Shayne was tired. He left Coleman still sitting on the edge of the table. The fat little man was not grinning. Coleman acted like a man who had lost a friend and did not know why.

Shayne went to bed swearing at Tim Rourke.

V

SHAYNE WOKE UP with the sun in his eyes. He had forgotten to pull down his shade. He also awoke with an appetite and renewed vigor. The unsolved file at Headquarters might be thick, but Mike Shayne had never had an unsolved case.

He jumped out of bed and made himself a dozen eggs, scrambled soft. Over his third cup of the best dripolator coffee, he called Bellow. The lieutenant was neither optimistic nor vigorous.

"Not a thing, Mike. My boys spent the whole night tracing what Mundt bought last year. Unless he hid it better than Fort Knox hides gold, he didn't buy anything worth killing a flea for," Bellow said. "We've checked the backgrounds of everyone. Clean as snow. Not a bad habit in a carload. I don't know, Mike I'm beginning to smell a psycho case."

"Not yet, George," Shayne said. "It just doesn't have a psycho pattern."

"It doesn't have any pattern, Mike," Bellow said.

Shayne looked at the telephone for some seconds after he hung up. His morning optimism was draining away already. He called Lucy Hamilton at his office. He got no better results. No one had called; nothing had happened. Mike Shayne got dressed.

His only logical next step was Fern Stickler. From all he had learned so far she would be little help. But in this kind of case the smallest thing could be the big key. Somewhere in the small details of the life of a quiet man there was a reason for murder. Maybe the Stickler woman would reveal it, even if she did not know it.

He went down to the garage beneath his apartment-hotel and drove his car out into the morning Miami sun. The address of the Stickler woman was a small but

elegant hotel in Miami Beach. After his drive across the MacArthur causeway, Shayne pulled up slowly to the building. He narrowed his grey eyes.

It was the first detail that did not exactly fit the quiet nature of the case so far. The hotel was small, yes, but it was one of those plush residential hotels where only the well-heeled lived. Women who lived alone in such a place were usually a little better off than a second-rate art dealer's associate.

Shayne considered the lush grounds of the elegant little hide-a-way. Because that was what this kind of place usually was for a single woman—a hide-a-way where the lady could be visited by her gentleman, or gentlemen, without his, or their, wives knowing about it. He began to wonder about Fern Stickler.

When he found her second-floor apartment, the entrance on a balcony overlooking a quiet and hidden center court of the hotel building, and knocked, he wondered even more. Fern Stickler herself answered the door. It was only ten in the morning, but Fern Stickler looked like she had just spent six hours in the beauty parlor.

Fern Stickler, Shayne decided, always looked like she had spent six hours in the beauty parlor. But she did not need six minutes in a beauty parlor. She stood in the doorway, a faint expression of questioning on her face, and without an inch of make-up, not even lipstick, and looked like Miss America. Except that women as beautiful as Fern Stickler don't usually bother to be Miss America. They don't have to.

"Yes?" Fern Stickler said.

She arched a perfect eyebrow above violet eyes. Her nose was small, straight and the exact right nose for her oval face. Her skin looked like a year-old baby's. Her lips were redder than rubies without lipstick. Her figure, wrapped in a pure silk wrap that had cost someone a bundle, would have made Miss Universe weep.

Shayne remembered his job. He wished he did not remember his job. Then he was glad he did. Women like Fern Stickler are bad for a hard-working detective.

"Miss Stickler?" Shayne said while he gathered his wits.

She smiled. "I think so. And you'll be Mr. Shayne, right? Paul called me last night. He's glad that someone is trying to solve this terrible thing."

"I'm glad he's glad," Shayne said. "May I come in?"

"I'm sorry, of course," the beautiful woman said.

She stepped aside and Mike Shayne brushed past her into the apartment. He touched her as he went and the shock was like a current of electricity. He made himself think of other things. He studied the room. It fitted with the

woman. It was expensive. Shayne sat down when the woman indicated the plush sofa and sat facing him in a butterfly chair that had cost at least $500.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Shayne," Fern Stickler said.

"You can tell me how come you live in a place like this when Coleman and Frieda Mundt tell me that the art business isn't exactly fortune-making," Shayne said bluntly.

"I could," Fern Stickler said, "but it's none of your damned business. Next question."

"Do you back up Coleman's story of the night?" Shayne said, changing the subject for the moment. But his mind was on the first question. The way Fern Stickler lived was the first sour note in the picture.

"Word for word. I told the police so I don't intend to waste breath repeating it. You can read my signed deposition."

"I'll do that," Shayne said drily.

"Good."

"What are your plans now," Shayne asked.

"Go on exactly as before, Mr. Shayne. I like my work. It keeps me busy, I'm good at it. Of course, that's if Frieda decides to continue the business. If she doesn't, I'll find another gallery to work for. Of course, Frieda doesn't know the business well. Maybe she'll make a deal for Paul and me to take over on a percentage basis."

"Would you like that?"

"Yes," Fern said, her violet eyes steady on Shayne's face. "I'd like that. I think I could run it well."

"Would you run it, or Coleman?"

"Both, but I think I know a bit more."

"The idea excites you?"

"Very much."

"Enough to murder?"

The beautiful woman opened her mouth, closed it, and just stared. She seemed to be wondering whether to shout or laugh. At this moment Mike Shayne realized that she was not as young as she seemed. Perhaps thirty-two or three —but she would look twenty-five almost forever.

"You know, Shayne, I really wonder. I mean, you couldn't even think anyone would kill for a penny-ante job like that. We're talking about running a little gallery for a kind of hobby."

"Okay," Shayne agreed. "What about this apartment? Come on, you couldn't have this on a penny-ante hobby type job."

"I told you it was none of your business," Fern snapped, showing anger for the first time.

"It is if it could add up to a motive," Shayne said. "And it could if Karl Mundt paid for it!"

Fern Stickler stared at Shayne. "Karl? Paid— You mean you're suggesting that Karl and I— Why, you ridiculous idiot! Old Karl and me?"

"It's happened," Shayne said. "Older men have been known to be stupid."

The beautiful woman stood. "Now you listen closely to me, Shayne. I did not kill Karl. There was nothing between us. I have my own man, a good man. He happens to also be a rich man, which is none of your business but I throw it in for luck. Now if you want to go out and try to find a motive for me, or if you want to try to find a little hanky-panky between me and Karl, you go right ahead. It might keep you busy and you can look like you're earning your fee!"

Shayne sat on the couch and smiled up at the angry woman, At least he had gotten his rise out of her. And she had told him one checkable fact—she had a rich boy friend who kept her in this style. It also opened up one really possible motive—jealousy! Perhaps the boy friend had wondered about Karl Mundt. Shayne felt almost good—he had a new man in the case. At last something else had opened up.

"What's the name of this paragon of a man you have?" Shayne asked.

"Name? Listen—" Fern began.

"We'll get it, Fern," Shayne said. "The police will get it if I don't."

Fern Stickler stared at Shayne. "John Marucci."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

Fern Stickler sat down. She crossed her magnificent legs and

Shayne's stomach did a flip. It must have shown on his face because the woman smiled. Then she suddenly remembered and her face became a mask of anger.

"If you want to investigate something, why not look into the robbery we had a year ago?"

Shayne sat straight up. "Robbery? At the gallery?"

Fern nodded. "Yes. They broke in and took quite a few things. Nothing very valuable, I admit. And Karl was fully insured, of course. Still, he did testify against them."

Shayne was beginning to feel fine. The woman was giving him a second motive possibility—revenge! And that would really fit the pattern of the crime. A small-time burglar out for revenge would be just the man to shoot through a window with a silenced pistol.

"How did it happen?"

"A simple hold-up. They broke in the back door. Held Karl and Paul at gun-point, tied them, and

cleaned out what was there, which wasn't much. They had bad luck; they hit just when our small inventory was at its lowest. They were caught, of course, and Karl and Paul identified them."

Shayne was wondering now why Bellow had not mentioned this.

"Do the police know this?"

Shayne was also wondering why neither Frieda Mundt nor Paul Coleman had mentioned it.

"Yes, I told them last night," Fern Stickler said. "As a matter of fact, I'd forgotten it. It was pretty small and a year ago."

Shayne stood up. "Thanks, Fern. This could be the motive."

The woman frowned. "You really think so?"

"Someone killed Karl, and there doesn't seem to be a reason. Revenge could be a reason. Of course, so could jealousy, so I'll talk to Mr. Marucci too."

"Get out of here, Shayne!"

Shayne went, grinning.

VI

MIKE SHAYNE found Lieutenant Bellow in his office disconsolately throwing playing cards into his hat. Bellow missed most of the time. The lieutenant did not seem to care.

Shayne took a seat. It was that kind of case.

"You forgot to tell me about the robbery," Shayne said.

"I only heard of it last night," Bellow said, missing with a black ace.

"I called this morning," Shayne said.

"We don't tell you everything, Mike," Bellow said.

The lieutenant missed with a red jack and gave up. He tossed the remainder of the pack on the desk and swiveled to face Shayne.

"Let the police try to solve a case first for once, Mike," Bellow said. "Besides, I didn't have anything on it this morning, and I don't now."

"You must have the names."

"Sure, and we're checking. When our check is complete, we'll tell you," Bellow said, and then leaned forward. "They're all small-timers, Mike—nothings. They got a few hundred for that job and couldn't even fade out."

"Small-timers have had big ideas before, George," Shayne said.

Bellow nodded. "I know, and this is the first break I've had in the case. Let me handle it, Mike. If you knew the names you'd still have to come to me to make the check-out."

"Okay, George," Shayne grinned. "You handle it. But you'll let me know what comes out."

"Sure, Mike," Bellow promised. "Damn it, I think this could be it. Just the pattern for a revenge killing! I tell you I was pretty discouraged. But if we can nail one of those boys right here in Miami, I think we've got it."

"All right, George, but let me know, right? I don't want to beat my head against a wall for nothing."

Bellow looked at Shayne. "You've got some ideas of your own I maybe don't know about?"

"Maybe," Shayne said.

"I can hold out, Mike. You can't."

"I'll tell you as soon as I know what I have myself," Shayne said, making it sound more than it was. All he had was John Marucci.

On the street again, the red-head considered his task. He could talk to Marucci, but guilty or innocent, Marucci was very unlikely to talk. It was a hundred-to-one that Marucci was a married man. A single man would not have let Fern Stickler walk around loose and free if he could help it.

Anyway, talking to Marucci would not help him prove any connection between the Stickler woman and Karl Mundt, and there had to be a connection before he could think about jealousy as a motive. No, what he had to do now was as clear as it was discouraging. He would have to start a careful check of the movements of Karl Mundt.

He got into his car and drove back to Miami Beach. He had a picture of Karl Mundt. He started with the superintendent of the hotel where Fern Stickler lived. He parked his car two blocks away and walked to the building very carefully, so as not to be observed by the Stickler woman.

The superintendent proved to be a tall, thin character in faded overalls. Shayne found him in the basement working on a water pipe. The man looked at the picture.

"Never saw that one," the super said.

"You're sure?" Shayne said, squatting in the dim cellar beside the super who lay on his back under the recalcitrant pipe.

"Sure I'm sure. That one don't visit Fern," the super said. "Plenty others, yeah? Only not that one."

"She has a lot of visitors?"

"Yeh, sure. You seen her? That one has to beat 'em off. Course, she ain't had so many since that Marucci showed. He's got a temper."

Shayne left the man swearing at his pipe. He slipped away unseen and waited down the street until he saw Fern Stickler leave. Then he returned to the building and showed the picture around.

"Police," Shayne told all the tenants, "the guy's a bank robber. We got a tip he was seen in this area."

When most of them heard that they were being asked to identify a bank robber, they looked at the picture eagerly. Disappointment showed instantly on all the faces when they could not identify Mundt. Two thought they had seen him, in fact they were sure, and proceeded to describe what they

thought would be the way a bank robber on the run would act. Shayne left the building no wiser than before.

By then it was noon. The red-head stopped at a Miami Beach restaurant and had a decent lunch —at least he owed himself that much. In the afternoon he turned his attention to the better clubs and bars on the Beach.

Most of the barmen knew Fern Stickler, at least those in her general neighborhood, but no one placed Karl Mundt. There was not even a flicker of recognition. Shayne felt discouraged. The more he worked, the more Karl Mundt came out as a dull, quiet, ridiculously normal man who loved his wife and his work.

But he kept at it, checking everywhere in the vicinity of Fern Stickler's hotel. He showed the picture at gas stations, shops, beach clubs, hotels, everywhere he could think of where a man and a woman might go. He drew a total blank, and by six o'clock that night he gave up.

He got back into his car and began his return drive across the causeway. He decided that tomorrow he would have to start working at the other end—the places near the Mundt gallery where Mundt might conceivably have taken Fern Stickler if he were having a clandestine affair.

But he did not feel optimistic. So far, the only faint hope seemed to be the robbery a year ago. He decided to stop for dinner before going up to his office. Lucy would be gone by now anyway, since he had not asked her to stay late.

He had his dinner at *Pallazzi's,* just off Flagler. It was a favorite of the red-head's. While he sipped a sidecar and waited for his first course he left the table and called Bellow. The lieutenant was not there, but Bellow's sergeant told Shayne that so far the results were not in on the robbery men. Shayne then called his office, but there was no answer.

He got Lucy Hamilton at home.

"Michael? I've been waiting for you to call!" she said.

"Okay, Angel," Shayne said, "it's been a long day, What's up?"

"A man called. More than once. I didn't recognize the voice, but he sounded angry," Lucy said.

"No name?"

"No name and no message. He just asked for you. When I said I'd take a message he said he'd deliver it personally and hung up."

Shayne tugged slowly on his left earlobe. "Just that, Angel? That he would deliver his message in person?"

"That's all, Michael. Do you think it's some information?"

"Let's hope so, Angel," Shayne said.

He hung up and went back to his table, still tugging on the earlobe. He felt a little better. Maybe the break was coming to him. A

lot of the time that was how it worked out. Without informants the police, and private eyes, would not get so far as they did. The life-blood of police work—the stool pigeon.

Shayne attacked his *fetuccini* and *veal scallopine a la Marsala* with renewed gusto. The food was good, and so was the coffee. He felt considerably better, and after paying the check he walked back out to his car. He drove the few blocks to his office. If someone wanted to contact him, he was going to be there.

He parked on the twilight street and rode up in the elevator. The building was deserted at this hour and he was alone on the self-service elevator they had only recently put in. He got off at his floor and headed down the long hall to his office.

He had his key in the lock when the man appeared.

The man was big and wide and his face was a twisted mask of hate.

Mike Shayne heard rather than saw the man come out of the stairwell door and run down the hall at him. The red-head whirled in time to see the face twisted with anger, and the fist the size of a small ham aimed straight at Shayne's jaw.

The man was good, but not good enough.

Shayne slipped the first punch. It glanced off his jaw and connected with his shoulder. The man was strong as an ox, and Shayne was knocked back against the wall beside his door.

The man came back swinging. He stepped in like a boxer and aimed a sharp left hook, the right cross already on its way.

Shayne blocked the left, slipped the right, and stepped in with a solid right to the man's gut.

The man grunted, staggered an inch, and came on swinging. He caught Shayne with a glancing left to the head. Shayne felt like he had been hit with a brick. He went down. The man aimed a kick with a massive foot.

Shayne caught the foot in mid-air, twisted hard and the man went over. Mike Shayne leaped up. The man made it up just as fast. Not a word had been spoken.

The attacker came on again. He swung a hard combination at Shayne. The red-head, breathing hard now, blocked and ducked, and saw his opening. His left caught the man full on the jaw, and the man spat blood. Shayne hit him with a right to the nose. Blood poured out onto the corridor floor.

The man wiped the blood away and came on again.

Shayne hit him twice on the jaw with lightning rights in quick succession.

The man doubled over this time. Shayne hit with a straight right uppercut on the face.

The man sagged and went down and lay there.

Shayne held on to the wall and breathed hard to get his breath back as he looked at his fallen opponent.

VII

THE MAN wiped the blood from his battered face and glared up at Mike Shayne.

"All right. Who the hell are you?" Shayne snapped.

"Go to hell, Shayne," the fallen man said.

Shayne looked at the man. He was big, but he was not in fighting trim. The bruises would show a long time. It looked as though he had broken the man's nose. One eye was going to be shut tight in an hour. There was much blood on the man's shirt.

"You know me, mister, but I don't know you," Shayne said harshly. "Now you just tell me quick what the hell you were after? Talk!"

"Big man!" the man sneered.

Shayne bent and snatched the big man up to his knees by the collar of his bloody shirt. The grey eyes of the detective were inches from the battered face of the stranger.

"Talk, joker!" Shayne said. "Talk or I'll have the police here in five minutes! I'll slap an assault charge on you so fast—"

The man broke away from Shayne's grip. But he did not yet try to get up. He saw the glint in Shayne's grey eyes. The man looked at Shayne with a kind of sullen hate.

"It's okay you go around making dirty charges, yeah?" the man said. "I defend my woman it's assault!"

Shayne blinked down at the man. "Defend your woman?"

"Yeh! My woman, you crumb! Where do you get off coming around with your dirty mouth!"

Shayne smiled a wolfish smile. "Marucci!"

"Go on, make a charge!" Marucci said.

Shayne bent down again. "So you came to defend the honor of your sweetheart, eh? You sure you didn't come to defend yourself, Marucci?"

"What the hell does that mean?" the battered man demanded.

"That means that maybe you've got better reasons than your girlfriend's outraged sensitivity!"

The man stared. "You're off your rocker, Shayne!"

Shayne considered the battered man. "Okay, let's step into my office and kick it around."

"Go to—" Marucci began.

"You've got a one-track mind," Shayne said. Then he bent again, suddenly, and hauled Marucci up by his shirt collar. "My office! Now!"

Marucci shuffled reluctantly through the opened door into Shayne's outer office. The detective had his first opportunity to

look at Marucci. He was surprised. During the fight he had had the impression that the man was a typical tough. Now he saw the expensive cut of Marucci's clothes, the clean hands, the manicured nails, the well-polished conservative shoes.

Marucci entered Shayne's private office. Twilight lit the office with a final soft glow of gold. Shayne waved Marucci to a seat and took out his bottle of Martel. He set the bottle, and two glasses, in front of Marucci. He watched the man pour like a man who knew what Martel was.

Mike Shayne studied the man's good shirt and conservative striped tie, bloody now but once expensive and tasteful.

"What do you do for a living, Marucci?" Shayne said as he sat in his swivel chair, put his feet up on his desk, and warmed his cognac between his hands.

The big battered man tasted the cognac. "Make money."

"Money you can tell the government about, or money you can't?" Shayne said drily.

Marucci reddened dully through his darkened bruises. "Listen, Shayne—"

Shayne slammed his fist on his desk. "Listen, hell! Look, buddy boy, I'm investigating a murder! You hear that? A cold murder! You jumped all over me. I can rack you for assault any time. I don't have me a motive for my murder, and from where I sit I'm not so sure you're just worried about the delicate feelings of Fern Stickler!"

Marucci sagged. "Okay, Shayne, I'm in real estate."

"Real estate?" Shayne said. "On the Beach?"

"All over Miami. I own a lot of buildings. I own the building Mundt's gallery is in. That's how I met Fern."

"Lucky man," Shayne said, but he was thinking carefully. He believed Marucci; it was something that could be easily checked.

He watched Marucci, who was beginning to show pain now. The eye of the man was almost closed. His face was swollen like a pulpy orange, and his broken nose was like a balloon. The pain would settle in strong very soon when the initial shock of battle and action had worn off.

Shayne tugged on his left earlobe. Real estate. A legitimate businessman. He met Fern normally, and showed a proper sense of ownership in the woman. Still, real estate could be a chancy, even shady-edged business, and Marucci had had a connection to Mundt—he owned the building of the gallery.

"Where were you the night Mundt was shot?" Shayne asked.

"That's easy," Marucci said. "I was at my health club. The Belvedere Athletic Club. I was there all night up to midnight."

"Why so late?"

"It's my regular night. I do the steam room, take a swim, work out a little, and play some handball. Most of the time I don't play the handball the same night, so I'm out by nine. Only this time Fern was tied up at the gallery. So I played handball late."

"Seen by fifty people who knew you, I suppose," Shayne said wearily as he saw another lead fading away.

"Sure. I've been going to the club every day for twelve years, Shayne. They know me by heart," Marucci said.

"Is there a back way?"

"At the club? Yeh, I think so."

"And the steam room is pretty hard to see in," Shayne said, and felt like a downing man grasping at a water-logged straw.

"Sure it is, but how do I get out? Besides, the time is wrong, from what Fern tells me. I was in the pool at the time."

"Twelve years," Shayne said. "You could probably bribe anyone there."

"Probably," Marucci said, "only I didn't. The customers know me, too, and I can't bribe them."

Shayne corked the bottle. "Go home. That nose looks broken. You better stop off at a doctor."

"I'll go, and you lay off Fern," Marucci said.

"If I can," Shayne said.

"Just do it."

"Like I said, Marucci, this is a murder case and a bad one. I have to look."

"Look somewhere else," Marucci said.

"I'll look where I have to, Marucci," Shayne said, "and so will the police. So go home, and try to stay around in case we need you."

The battered man left. Shayne watched Marucci go and heard in his ears the echo of his last idle threat. No one was going to need Marucci. The big real estate man and lover of Fern Stickler had an air-tight alibi and no motive that Shayne had yet been able to find.

He sat alone in the office, thinking about what more he could do, until it was dark and the lights blazed all across the great city outside his window. He was left with a motiveless, pointless killing—or the revenge of four small-time thieves. And pointless murders were becoming more common every day.

But a detective cannot believe in pointless murders. They are bad for business. Shayne turned on the light and reached for the telephone. This time Lieutenant Bellow was in his office. The lieutenant did not sound like the holder of happy tidings.

"We've got it all, Mike," Bellow said, "and it's a big round zero."

"How zero?" Shayne asked, but his heart was not in it.

"There were four men. They were all caught like ripe apples. Mundt identified them all all right.

and we got a good conviction on them all. Each of them is still inside. They all have good records. Two of them never had a visitor, get no mail.

"The other two have been visited only by their families. We've run a full check on known friends and associates. All the friends check out clean. I won't bother you with the rundown. I've used more manpower on this case than they used on Jack The Ripper, and with about the same result. Let's just say that, as far as I can tell, our boys did not have Karl Mundt shot."

Shayne sat in the office and thought about the shocked face of Frieda Mundt. The face of a woman who could not believe the cruel blow that had befallen her. The woman who had to know *why* so that she could believe again that she lived, after all, in a rational world.

"But you can't actually rule it out," Shayne said.

"No, I can't rule it out all the way," Bellow admitted from the gloom of his own office, "but I can't prove any connection either. Of course, we'll keep checking, Mike. I've got the word out to every stoolie we have. But it looks like another dead end."

"What are you going to do?"

"Start around again," Bellow said.

"If you meet me on the way, wave," Shayne said and hung up.

What next?

Nowhere.

Shayne picked himself up and went out. He rode down in the elevator again, and thought about Johnny Marucci, and hoped that the broken nose would not make her hero unattractive to the luscious Fern Stickler.

He went to the movies. He saw a good western and a bad comedy. Neither made him feel better. He went home after the movie to sleep on his problem, or, at least, to sleep the problem away for the night.

He slept well.

In the night the voice whispered to him.

VIII

THE VOICE in his sleep said, . . . *or someone with a motive so hidden it had died with Karl Mundt.*

Mike Shayne woke up.

The red-head lay there looking up at his dark ceiling, and out his opened window at the scattered lights of a city asleep. The voice continued to talk. Shayne listened.

A motive so hidden it died with Mundt.

"You mean only Mundt knew the motive?" he asked the voice aloud.

Mundt and the killer. Maybe only the killer!

"That's hard to take," Shayne debated aloud in the dark and silent room.

You remember other cases where it happened, mister, the voice said.

"So?" Shayne asked.

So ask yourself to take a good look at the case, my boy. You know what to look for.

"Something new, something odd, something even a hair out of the ordinary," Shayne said aloud.

The red-head sat up in bed and lit a cigarette. He smoked. What did he know that was new or odd in the case. Nothing. That was the peculiar problem of the whole thing, that Karl Mundt had done nothing out of the ordinary that anyone seemed to remember for years.

All right, had anyone else done anything out of the usual? Frieda Mundt? Paul Coleman? Fern Stickler, John Marucci, anyone?

The voice spoke, *Look for anything in any way different, no matter how small. Something bad or good. Something that happened to one of them, maybe.*

"Something that happened to Karl Mundt. Something real *good,*" Shayne said aloud. "Yeah, that's it. There is something. It was—it was—"

And then Mike Shayne had it. The red-head blinked where he sat in the bed. He got up and paced. He had it, but he did not like it. Too small. So small as to be ridiculous, and yet—

The voice that whispered to him and woke him was right. When there was only one small fact, situation that did not fit the normal routine of a murdered man, and there was no explanation for the murder to be found in the man's normal life, then the one small odd fact had to be the answer.

If it was the only thing out of place, it had to be the key!

Shayne dressed. Then he looked around him as if just now seeing exactly what time it was. The sky was only beginning to lighten in the east over Biscayne Bay. It was not quite dawn. The people he now had to talk to would be asleep. Shayne swore softly. He did not want to lose his tenuous hold on what might be *it.*

He sat on the edge of the bed, lit a cigarette, and dialed the number of Tim Rourke. He got no answer. He hung up and dialed Rourke's office at *The Miami Daily News.* The reporter was there.

"It must be big if you call at this hour, Mike," his lanky friend said. "I was about to knock off."

"Come on over here," Shayne said, "we'll have some breakfast."

"You've got something?" Rourke asked.

"Maybe. I don't know for sure," Shayne said.

Fifteen minutes later Mike Shayne and Tim Rourke faced each other across the table of a booth in the all-night restaurant a few blocks from Shayne's apartment-hotel. The cadaverous reporter stared at Shayne.

"His paintings?" Rourke said. "Was Mundt a painter? I mean, was he any good?"

"Apparently not much good," Shayne said and sipped his coffee. It was rotten coffee, warmed over, but Shayne had other things on his mind on this grey dawn.

"Then why would anyone kill him over his paintings?" Rourke said, puzzled.

Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe. "Listen, Tim. The case is at a dead-end. There isn't a motive. But Mundt was shot. It doesn't sound like a psycho or an accident. So there has to be, somewhere, a motive for planned, cold-blooded murder."

The red-head drank at his hot coffee. "Now, I've thought of everything that could be considered unusual in the case, or in Mundt's life, which is the same thing. There is only one thing at all out of the ordinary—Karl Mundt sold four paintings this year."

Shayne rubbed his jaw. "He sold four paintings of his own this year, when, according to Coleman, Karl barely sold one every four or five years! Coleman himself said that it was very unusual, and that Karl was pleased as a schoolboy."

"How much did he sell them for?" Rourke said.

"No," Shayne said, "that isn't the point. They went for a few bucks. The point, Tim, is that *it was unusual for Karl to sell any paintings, and suddenly he sold four!*"

"Maybe he got better," Rourke said.

Shayne nodded. "Maybe he did. And maybe he just ran into a crank that likes third-rate paintings. But maybe it means something. Anyway, it's all I've got just now, and I'm going to follow it up."

Rourke shook his head. "Personally I'd still look for a woman somewhere, or for one of those robbery boys. It's got all the sound of a Willie Sutton type revenge killing."

"It has," Shayne agreed, "and probably is, unless it was just a psycho, and it will probably never be solved. But I've got an unusual fact and it's the only one I have. And I've also got a hunch about it. Remember, Tim, it was enough out of the ordinary for Karl for Coleman to mention it to me. For some reason it had stayed in Coleman's mind."

"It's your work, Mike," Rourke said. "Keep me posted, right?"

"I will, Tim," Shayne said.

The two men finished their coffee and eggs and left the restaurant. Tim Rourke went home, and Mike Shayne went to work. The sun was up now, a fine morning in Miami. And Shayne had a strong hunch that something was going to break. He felt it in the clear air.

His first stop was the quiet house of Mrs. Frieda Mundt. The widow was up having coffee. Mrs. Mundt did not look like she had been to bed at all. Her round face was growing more haggard by the day. Shayne accepted a cup of coffee. The widow watched him hopefully.

"Do you have something to tell me, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne shook his head. "No, not yet. So far the police and I haven't come up with a motive, much less a suspect. But I've got a question."

"At least that is some progress," the widow said bitterly.

"It could be," Shayne said. "I want to know about Karl's painting."

The widow blinked. "His painting? What painting, Mr. Shayne? Karl bought many—"

"No, I mean his own painting. The paintings he did himself."

The woman stared. "Karl's own painting? Good grief, Mr. Shayne, that was nothing but a hobby, and not one he pursued that strongly. You don't mean to imply—"

"I'm not implying anything just yet," Shayne interrupted, "but I have a good reason to think there is something out of the ordinary involved with his paintings. You say he did not pursue it strongly?"

"No, not even every Sunday. Oh, most Sundays we would drive somewhere, and Karl usually took his materials. But he did not always work."

"Just on Sundays?"

"And on our vacations. I suppose that was when he painted most, on our vacations. I am not terribly strong; I like a nap every afternoon. Karl usually went out with his paints at that time."

"What did he paint?"

"Landscapes mostly," Frieda Mundt said. "Yes, almost always. He loved the scenery. He especially like seascapes. On our last vacation, at Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, he painted a great deal. As a matter of fact he liked it so much we had already planned to return to Edgartown this year if we could not afford Bermuda."

"How many did he usually sell?"

Frieda laughed. "Almost none. No, Mr. Shayne, it was simply a hobby. Oh, Karl could draw. His work was very realistic, but he was far too good a judge of art to have much opinion of his own efforts."

"But he sold four this year?"

The widow stared at Shayne. "Why, yes, so he did! I had forgotten. He sold them only a month or so ago! All of them! Do you really mean—"

"I don't know," Shayne said, "but you agree that it was unusual?"

"Very unusual, in fact—" The woman stopped.

Shayne prompted her. "In fact what, Mrs. Mundt?" the red-head said gently.

"In fact, Mr. Shayne, I sent one person to see Karl at his office. I mean, the person came here asking for Karl, and asking about his paintings. She wanted to see them."

"She?" Shayne snapped.

"Yes, it was a woman. I never saw her before."

"Would you recognize her again?"

The woman shook her head. "No, I don't think so. But I do remember her name. It was Smith. Alice Smith. I remember because Karl told me later that she actually bought a painting. Two, as a matter of fact."

"Will Karl have a record somewhere?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne. I rather doubt he kept much of a record. As I said, he did not take his hobby very seriously."

Shayne finished his coffee. "Thanks, Mrs. Mundt. This may mean something."

He left the woman sitting at her kitchen table looking very alone and very lost. He drove straight to the Mundt Gallery. It was now past nine-thirty, and Paul Coleman was in the Gallery. There was a customer, but Coleman got rid of him fairly fast. The fat little man came over to Shayne.

"What did you do to Fern, Shayne? She said she wouldn't be in for a day or so," Coleman said.

"Probably nursing her friend Marucci," Shayne said. "But we've got something more important to talk about. You remember telling me about four of his own paintings that Karl sold?"

"Of course. It was the big event of our year," Coleman said with a wide grin.

"It may turn out to be bigger than you think," Shayne said. "Do you know what paintings, and who bought them?"

Coleman scratched his chin. "Well, not exactly, but I think Karl kept a kind of notebook. Let's take a look in his desk."

Shayne followed the fat little man back to the office of the murdered man. Coleman stared at the desk a moment, and then began to rummage among mounds of papers and assorted junk in all the desk drawers. It was a slow process, and finally Coleman stood up empty-handed and frowned.

"Wait a minute," Coleman said.

The art associate went to the filing cabinets and unlocked the last one. He opened each drawer in turn, and closed it again. Finally he opened the bottom drawer and smiled. He reached in and took out a stained loose-leaf notebook. He opened it and nodded.

"Here it is, Shayne. Yes, he sold

only four this year, and all within a few days just about a month ago. See?"

Shayne took the notebook and looked at the entry. It was simply written in long-hand, the notation that a Miss Alice Smith, 2120 Ortega Place, Miami, had bought *Landscape in Blue* and *The Red Yachts*.

And the second notation that one James Pike, 19 South Padre Terrace, Miami Beach, had bought *The White House* and *Seascape In Grey And Red*. In each case the price had been fifty dollars. The dates were not listed.

Shayne looked at Coleman. "That's all?"

"That's it. I remember that Karl said they even paid in cash, so there's no record of a check at the bank. Anyway, the check would have gone back to them by now if there had been any checks."

"Do you happen to remember these paintings?"

Coleman laughed. "Hell, no! I could never tell one of Karl's pieces from the other. As I said, Shayne, he was a rank amateur. Very good on realism, but his composition was nothing. He framed every painting in the same composition. I mean, they all tended to look alike—the same angle, the same cloud shapes, the same light quality. He really only could paint a day scene in sunlight."

"Are there any of his paintings around?"

"I think so," Coleman said. "Come on."

The paintings turned out to be in a stack behind crates of the art objects the gallery sold. They were in the long and windowless room where the associates had been working the night of the murder. Coleman pulled them out one by one and showed them to Shayne with a certain indulgent disgust.

"You see? Calendar art, and Karl knew it."

Shayne looked at each picture in turn. They were, as Coleman said, little more than competent calendar scenes, and they had a sameness as if Mundt had really known how to paint only one picture with many variations. They were all landscapes except four. Three were portraits, and bad portraits, and one was an abstract. They were all technically competent. In fact they were meticulously detailed and completely recognizable. As good as photographs and no better.

"But you don't remember the ones he sold?" Shayne said.

"No. How could I?"

"Thanks anyway, Coleman."

Shayne turned to go. Coleman watched him. The fat man was obviously puzzled.

"You think Karl's paintings have something to do with his murder, Shayne?"

"I don't know," Shayne said, already on his way out through the gallery, "but I'm going to try to find out!"

In his car again the red-head lighted a cigarette and blew smoke in a long stream. Two of them. One had had to go to the house to find Mundt, which meant that the woman had only the murdered man's name and home address. Both paid in cash, which was unusual these days when every teen-ager had a checking account. Both had bought two paintings, not one, and both were Miami residents. This was strange in a way.

A Miami resident who knew about Karl Mundt at all, and certainly anyone who knew enough about him to know that he painted as a hobby, might have been expected to know that there was a Mundt Gallery.

There was enough peculiar. It was worth checking out.

IX

MIKE SHAYNE drove slowly along Ortega Place with a tight feeling in his stomach. It was a tightness of excitement.

The block where Miss Alice Smith lived was a shabby street of broken-down houses and poor shops. It did not look like a street of art lovers. In fact it did not look like a street where the people had fifty bucks to spend on cheap booze, much less on an amateur painting!

The red-head had a strong hunch that Miss Alice Smith had had some strong reason to buy two

paintings, and the reason was not a love of art.

Then he saw the number on the last house on the block: 2124!

He put his car in reverse and backed up slowly. He saw 2122, and then, backing, 2118. Shayne stopped. He drove slowly forward. The numbers stared at him: 2118, 2122, 2124. He turned to the other side of the street. Back up. The numbers jumped at him: 2125, 2123, 2121.

There was no 2120 Ortega Place in Miami!

Shayne pulled to the curb and sat there in the sun, tugging at his earlobe. Two shabby women who were probably forty but looked sixty sat on sagging porches of their houses and stared at the detective. Shayne barely noticed them. His

mind was on 2120 Ortega Place. A number that did not exist.

The implication was enough to make Shayne a lot more excited. But the fact was anything but exciting.

The implication was clear: whoever Miss Alice Smith was, she had given a false address. A person who gives a false address has something to hide. She was probably not even Alice Smith. His hunch that the odd fact of the sold paintings had some connection to a motiveless murder began to look more and more a fact rather than a hunch.

That was exciting.

The dead-end of a phony address was not exciting. He had a mystery woman without an address, probably without a name, and who had paid in cash and vanished somewhere inside a great city. Or somewhere inside a very large country!

Because Mike Shayne had a strong doubt that Miss "Alice Smith" lived in Miami at all!

Abruptly he started his motor again and drove off. He had another address to try. Padre Terrace, he knew, was across the nearest causeway and on the northern edge of Miami Beach. He drove in the sun with a definite hope. The two people had bought paintings on the same day. Perhaps Mr. James Pike had seen Miss "Alice Smith."

The traffic on the Beach was heavy, and it was almost noon by the time Shayne reached Padre Terrace. It was a quiet little street of expensive bungalows. Shayne drove down it and came up against the Bay. He looked out at the water.

This time it was not 19 South Padre Terrace that was not there —it was South Padre Terrace itself that was not there. To be sure, Shayne drove back along the entire short street. There was Padre Terrace, but no South Padre Terrace. Maybe Karl Mundt had made a mistake. Shayne stopped in front of number 19 and got out.

The woman who answered the door of number 19 was tall, thin and forty. She laughed a harsh laugh when Mike Shayne asked for Mrs. James Pike.

"Friend, if there was a 'mister' here I wouldn't ask what his name was," the woman said.

The name plate on the door was explicit. *Miss Jane Darrin.*

"No Pike?" Shayne said.

"No man," the woman said.

"Are there any Pikes on the block?"

"Not that I ever heard, friend," the tall woman said, "and on this block you hear. But don't go away mad. Come on in; have a drink."

"Some other time," Shayne said. "But thanks for the offer."

"That's what they always say," Miss Jane Darrin sighed.

Shayne tipped his panama with a grin and walked back to his car.

There it was. He sat in his car

and lit a cigarette. Mr. James Pike was not going to tell him much about Miss Alice Smith. Were they in whatever it was together? If so, why? So that Karl Mundt would not get suspicious about one person suddenly wanting four of his paintings? But, then, why did the two of them want the four paintings? Or did they?

Maybe the four were just coverups for *one* painting.

Shayne had to see the four paintings. But how? It was a thousand to one neither "James Pike" nor "Alice Smith" were really residents of Miami. On top of that, even if he could find them, it was a million to one that if they had wanted those paintings so badly, the paintings were destroyed by now. They had certainly not wanted the paintings for art!

Somehow, Mike Shayne had to see those paintings, or at least get a good description. He started his motor again, and once more drove through Miami Beach and back to Miami. This case was becoming more a trip than a matter of detection. But at least Shayne felt that he was at last on the trail of something. For the first time in the affair, a line of possibility was becoming more probable than less with each new fact.

He had started with the small oddity of four bad paintings sold that should not have sold. Now he had two mystery people with phony names and phony addresses. He had some suspects. He also had a blank wall. He needed one big break. He got his break two minutes after once more driving up to the house of the murdered Karl Mundt.

Frieda Mundt was there, looking a little better. Shayne strode into the warm little living room. Frieda Mundt followed him in. She could see the excitement on his face.

"You've learned something!" the widow cried eagerly.

Shayne nodded. "I think so, but I've got to have some help. Can you remember any of your husband's paintings? Can you remember the places he might have painted?"

"Remember them? Well, yes and no. I mean, I doubt if I could describe specific paintings, Mr. Shayne, if that is what you mean."

"That's what I mean," Shayne said. "Damn it, I've got to look at the four he sold!"

The widow blinked. "Look at them? Well, that should be easy enough."

It was Shayne's turn to stare. The red-head let his lower jaw drop open.

"Easy?" Shayne said. "To look at the paintings he sold?"

The widow nodded. "Yes. You can look at all of them. You see, Karl took color slides of all his work. He liked to look at them, and show—"

"Where are they?" Shayne snapped.

"Why, I have them upstairs,"

Mrs. Frieda Mundt said. "You know it's very common nowadays for a painter to have color slides made. Canvases are so hard to carry around."

And there was the break, the one big break he had needed. Mike Shayne felt a little weak. For the first time in this thankless case he was getting a break.

"Get them, will you?" Shayne cried.

"Of course," Frieda Mundt said.

While the woman went upstairs, Shayne paced. The small house was very silent. The house that had been the home of a small and unimportant man murdered for no apparent reason. But maybe the reason would soon be apparent. The woman came down the stairs with a small box. Shayne took the box eagerly.

"Each slide is titled the same as the painting, Mr. Shayne," Frieda Mundt said.

Shayne nodded and held the slides up to the light. He found the four he wanted. They were, as Coleman had said, all very much like the originals Shayne had seen at the Gallery. They were too small to tell much. Shayne took the four slides.

"I'll take these, Mrs. Mundt, and have them blown up. One thing—do you know where each was painted?"

Mrs. Mundt took each slide and looked at them. "Well, yes I think so. *Landscape In Blue* and *Seascape In Grey And Red* were painted on our last vacation at Martha's Vineyard. *The Red Yachts* was done about five months ago on a Sunday, when we went to Key Biscayne just across the Bay. *The White House* was painted on a Sunday trip just a few miles north of here."

Shayne was thoughtful. "Martha's Vineyard, eh? And that was your last vacation?"

"Yes, Mr. Shayne. About a month or so ago Karl wrote to the Walshes up there to tell them we would probably be coming back this year very soon. Karl liked it very much there."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "Did they know that Karl painted? The people at Martha's Vineyard?"

"I think so, at least the Walshes did. Karl gave them some of his work that summer."

"Thanks," Shayne said.

"Do you—do you really think you have something?"

Shayne nodded. "I think so, but I'm not sure any of us are going to like it much. I'll be in touch."

Outside again, the red-head got into his car and drove straight to a commercial photography shop he knew. He explained what he wanted. Max Conrad, the photographer friend, nodded.

"How big you want it, Mike?"

"As big as it'll take with pretty good definition," Shayne said.

Conrad studied the slides. "Not

bad grain. I'll try a ten by twelve and see how they go."

Shayne nodded, lighted another cigarette, and sat down to wait.

X

THE FOUR brightly colored prints were spread out on Max Conrad's table in the back room.

"Pretty good detail, Mike. I can make them a little bigger, but you'd lose some definition. Of course, the colors are only approximate."

"I know, Max," Shayne said.

The red-head was fairly excited. Karl Mundt had used a thin paint and a fine-line drawing. The prints looked to Shayne about as accurate as the originals. And the ten by twelve size gave good definition. Every detail was clear; Karl Mundt did not go in for small details.

Shayne studied all the prints. *The Red Yachts* seemed to offer very little. It was a seascape of Biscayne Bay with four large sailing yachts obviously racing in the foreground. The rest was nothing but sea and sky. The men on the yachts were only shapes. The yachts themselves were good and clear, but Mike Shayne could not imagine what such a painting could possibly reveal.

Because that was what he was looking for—something in the paintings that could be a motive for murder!

It was all that made any sense now. One, or more, of these four paintings must reveal something the killer did not want revealed. Something so important to the killer that, after getting the painting, he then returned to kill Mundt for fear that the art dealer just *might,* someday and somehow, remember what he had painted.

And Shayne's money was on Martha's Vineyard—where Karl Mundt had been planning to return, and where they knew Karl was planning to return.

He turned his attention to *The White House.* This made him frown more. It showed a fine old mansion, painted all white, and two people standing on the lawn. The people were a young man and woman, and while their faces were not painted clear, their clothes were detailed. They seemed to be laughing. And there were the two of them. A man and a woman. Shayne studied the print of *The White House* for some time, but that was all he could see.

The last two, *Seascape In Grey And Red,* and *Landscape in Blue,* were of somewhere Mike Shayne did not recognize, except that they were both of a rustic, sandy, Northern shore. These, then were the Martha's Vineyard two. They were both, actually, seascapes. One was of a broad blue sea and long sandy beach and sloping green fields behind. Two people sat on a stone wall in this one. The other was a more stormy scene, rockier and with a greyer sea. It, the last,

seemed to have been painted later in the day.

All four paintings were signed and dated.

Mike Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe as he looked at the signature and the date on each print. His eyes glowed like steel grey lights. He thought he had a motive for murder!

Most painters will sign a work. Most will also date it with the year. Many date it with the month, too. But Karl Mundt, perhaps because he was a Sunday painter, dated with year, month—and day!

Shayne leaned over the table, staring at the four prints. Three of them had people in them. They all seemed innocent enough—but? Shayne slowly lit a cigarette and continued to look at the prints of Karl Mundt's paintings.

Max Conrad was anxious. "Are they okay, Mike? I mean, is it what you want?"

"They're fine, Max."

Conrad smiled. "That's great. I did okay, Mike?"

"You did great, Max. Now make up two more copies of each one and send them over to Lucy Hamilton in my office. Okay?"

"Will do, Mike," Max said.

Shayne gathered up the prints and walked out into the Miami sun. He was convinced that he had found his key. Now he had to make it fit the lock, and that might not be easy. If the two art buyers, or one because there was no certainty that they were together, had killed Karl Mundt, there was still no direct evidence.

To get that, the first step was to try to find out what was so important about the paintings. The location of the painting called *The White House* was the nearest, and therefore first.

He called Mrs. Mundt to get the exact approximate location, as far as she could remember it, and then drove north along the coast toward Palm Beach.

He found the house just about where Mrs. Mundt had said. It was on the highway to the left across from an open place at the edge of the sea where, obviously, Karl Mundt had set up his easel. Shayne parked on the open area where Mundt had parked. He studied the scene against the print of Mundt's work.

Mundt, no matter what he had been as a formal artist, was a decent technician. No one would have had any trouble identifying the house or the area from the painting. Shayne started his motor again, and drove off to the township police office. As he knew, the town police in the area shared their office with the local headquarters of the sheriff of the county. In ten minutes he was in the office.

The sergeant on the desk looked up lazily as Mike Shayne came in.

"Yeh?"

Shayne identified himself. The sergeant was not impressed, but a

voice suddenly called from an inner office.

"Shayne!"

A man stepped to the door of the inner office. He was one of the biggest men anyone had ever seen. He made Shayne look small. He was all smiles.

"Hello, Moose," Shayne said.

Deputy Sheriff Jon "Moose" Monahan waved Shayne into his office. The two men talked for a few minutes. Shayne and the deputy sheriff had worked on cases in the past when Moose was on the Miami force. Monahan was a good cop, a little too quick with his hands on suspects, and had retired when the chance came to join the county sheriff's office.

"So what can I help with, Mike?" Moose asked.

Shayne tossed the print of the painting of *The White House* onto Monahan's desk.

"You can tell me if that means anything to you," Shayne said.

Moose looked at the print. "Sure, Mike. It's the Girard place out on the highway. Pretty good work, too. The two people are George Girard and his sister Melanie."

"That's all?"

Moose looked up. "What else? I mean, there it is. If you want something wrong about the place or the Girards, there isn't anything I know."

"No reason anyone would want that painting suppressed?"

Moose shrugged. "None I know, Mike, and I know just about everything about this section of the county."

Shayne stood up. "Okay, Moose, and thanks. Only nose around a little, okay? I mean, just check out those two Girards."

"Will do, Mike," Moose agreed.

Shayne returned to his car. He could see no possible reason to check out *The Red Yachts.* Which left him with Martha's Vineyard. It looked like a long trip. The distant New England island fitted all the facets of the motiveless murder. The paintings were done there. Karl Mundt had been there and was to return. And the two who had bought the paintings were probably not from Miami.

The detective sensed, with excitement, that the answer was in Martha's Vineyard. But how was he going to recognize the answer?

As he drove back to Miami, the red-head wondered what he would find in Martha's Vineyard, and just how he was going to connect it to an unseen killer in a Miami alley.

XI

BUT THE unseen killer found Mike Shayne.

Lucy Hamilton had made all the arrangements. The brown-eyed girl telephoned the Jones Inn in Edgartown and made the reservation.

"I gave them the Mundt's name as a reference, Michael," Lucy ex-

plained. "Your name and the Miami address."

Shayne did not sense the mistake at the time. He had made no mention of his profession or his reason for going to the Vineyard, he decided to make no attempt to contact the Vineyard police until he got there. He was looking for a shadow who had lurked in a back alley, and he needed time to look.

But he got no time.

His flight from Miami to New York that morning was smooth and uneventful. He landed at LaGuardia and had an hour layover before the flight was due out for Martha's Vineyard. There was no time to do anything special, and it was much too early in the day for drinking, so Shayne wandered out into the early summer sun of New York to look out across Flushing Meadow.

He had not walked far when he heard, behind him, the public address system calling out his name.

Perhaps it was the clear morning. Or perhaps it was just the early hour and the distance still to go on his mission. But whatever it was, Shayne turned when he heard his name, and started back toward the building.

"Mr. Michael Shayne of Miami, please report to the information desk. Mr. Michael Shayne of Miami."

Shayne had taken a dozen steps and was nearing the building when he suddenly stopped short. Who was paging him? Who knew he was in New York? Lucy? But Lucy would not have him paged as "Mr. Michael Shayne *of Miami!*"

Shayne came alert.

It saved his life.

Planes were arriving and departing regularly, and there was a large crowd of people going in and out of the building. Shayne never saw the killer, but the killer obviously saw him.

The two shots rang out muffled and deadly in the morning air.

Shayne dove for the dirt.

He heard the whine of the first shot just past his ear as he began to go down. The second shot kicked up concrete chips and there was a scream behind him.

The silenced shots were so muffled that at first no one in the crowd reacted except Mike Shayne who had, a split second before they came, realized that he had been trapped.

Then there was the scream as a woman behind him crumpled to the concrete.

Screams echoed. There were shouts. The milling people began to panic. Security police appeared. Shayne had no time for them. He rolled and crawled behind a low wall, all the time that his grey eyes were searching the crowd for the killer.

But the killer had gone, melted into the frantic mob of airline passengers. No one noticed Mike Shayne. No one saw the assailant.

The woman who had been hit was surrounded by guards now. Already the loudspeaker was madly calling for a doctor.

Shayne could see that the woman was sitting up, staring with shocked and incredulous eyes at her bleeding leg where the bullet had struck her after hitting the concrete.

Shayne searched the milling mob with his eyes. But it was hopeless. The killer had vanished, there would be no one who had seen him and could be considered reliable. But Shayne had learned something.

The killer was aware of his trip and its purpose.

The killer had had him paged to identify him, and while the attack had failed, the killer now knew who Shayne was!

And Mike Shayne did not know who the killer was.

From now on the detective would be a sitting duck.

He stood up, dusted off his clothes, and went into the building. He identified himself at the information desk, and asked who had paged him. The girl at the desk had nothing on her mind but the shooting. She could not remember. She did not even try. Shayne went to his flight.

Aboard the small jet, Shayne sat alert. He studied his fellow passengers. Any of them could be the killer. He recognized no one, but, then, he had not expected to. Whoever this killer was, he had been essentially unknown even to Karl Mundt, if Shayne's theory was correct.

Nothing happened on the flight.

The small jet circled Martha's Vineyard after leaving New Bedford, and Shayne looked below at the island that was like a green oasis just off the coast of Cape Cod. The long beach showed a line of surf, and beyond the beach was the white line of the sandbars.

He stepped off the jet cautiously. He watched his fellow passengers who got off, but their faces told him nothing. The airport was in the center of the island.

Shayne found a taxi, and gave the address of The Jones Inn in

Edgartown. His grey eyes studied everything around him.

The taxi drove out of the airport and turned left on the main road toward Edgartown. No other vehicle from the airport passed Shayne. None had preceded him from the field. In the taxi he sat back. As long as he was in Edgartown before anyone else from the jet he would probably be safe.

But he remained alert. The taxi driver, unaware of any danger and familiar with the road, was not alert. Just as the taxi reached a deep dip in the highway, at a point where the thick growth of a kind of forest lined both sides of the road, a single loud shot rang out and hung in the clear air.

A sharp, cracking shot.

It was, Shayne's mind told him instantly, the shot of a high-powered deer rifle.

What happened next seemed to take place in slow-motion.

There was another loud report. The car seemed to lurch across the road. The driver swung his wheel in an attempt to hold the lurching car on the road. As if floating on air, the taxi swung back and seemed to rise up and jump lazily from the right side of the road out over a deep ditch and into the trees.

Shayne hung on grimly as the taxi sailed. The driver held the steering wheel as if unable yet to know just precisely what was happening. Then the car descended, hit a tree, bounced, rolled, and crashed into the ditch with a shattering roar. It bounced again, swayed, tilted, and came to rest upright and shivering like some wounded animal.

Shayne lay half on his side, stunned. He had hung on, and as a result had not been thrown around the car or out. But his shoulder hurt, and his arm hung limp. It did not feel broken, but the muscles were torn, and when he tried to move it there was sharp pain. He winced.

The pain seemed to clear his mind.

Whoever had fired the shot, and his mind now told him that there were, after all, two of them, would not trust to the "accident."

The driver lay slumped over the wheel, his head against the smashed window. Shayne did not know if the driver were dead or just badly hurt. He had no time to find out. He would not help the driver by staying to be shot.

Painfully, with a supreme effort, Mike Shayne forced the smashed door open and crawled out. He fell into the bushes and began to crawl. He crawled for what seemed like hours in the dark of the pine forest. It was only minutes. He heard footsteps.

The footsteps came cautiously across the road. They were light steps, quick though cautious, like the steps of someone small—or of a woman.

Shayne rolled into the deep shadow of a thick growth of low pines. He reached for his .45 automatic.

There was no automatic!

Shayne swore. The gun must have fallen out in the crash, and he had not noticed in his pain and anxiety to get out of there. Now he had no gun.

He felt like a forest animal who shivers in the bushes as the sounds of the hunter's feet come inexorably closer.

The footsteps stopped. Whoever the person was, he, or she, was now at the car and knew that Shayne was not there.

Shayne took a deep breath and stood up among the trees. He felt weak, but he could walk. He stared back towards the wrecked car. A figure stood near it. A small figure dressed in the jacket, trousers, cap and boots of a hunter. Shayne could not see the face. The figure held a long deer rifle.

At this moment there was the sound of a motor on the road. A car was coming. The figure with the rifle looked once almost straight at where Mike Shayne was hiding, then quickly vanished among the trees.

The car appeared and saw the wreck. The car skidded to a halt. A small man jumped out and ran to the wreck. He peered in and seemed to touch the driver slumped over the wheel. For an instant the man straightened up and looked around. Shayne wanted to shout and run to the stranger.

But he could not.

The figure with the deer rifle was certainly watching, even as Shayne was watching. The unknown rifleman was a crack shot. Shayne did not think the rifleman would hesitate to shoot both the stranger and Mike Shayne if the red-head tried to reach the stranger. The risk was too great.

Shayne was forced to stand there in the gloom of the trees and watch the small stranger run back to his car and drive off toward Edgartown.

The red-head understood. The man, properly, was going for help rather than attempt to move the injured driver. And Shayne had a sudden surge of hope. The police would come. There would be doctors and an ambulance. With that many people, it might be possible for him to get back to the road without being shot.

Then the hope faded. A second car suddenly drew up near the wreck. A man got out. Shayne could not make out the face—but suddenly he knew the man who stood there beside the wreck. It was the man who stood behind the barn in Karl Mundt's painting of *Seascape In Grey And Red!*

A tall, black-haired, muscular man wearing the same work clothes now that he had worn in Karl Mundt's painting. A square-jawed man with dark and deadly eyes

and a look of hate on his face. Even as Shayne watched, the man got back into his car, and drove back to a small dirt side road. The man turned the car into the road and began to drive through the trees.

He was getting behind Shayne!

Then Shayne saw the small figure with the deer rifle walking slowly toward him.

Shayne turned, gritted his teeth against the pain, and ran like the hunted animal he suddenly had become.

XII

IT WAS DARK now, a dark and moonless night. Mike Shayne had run and crawled and hidden for hours. But they were still moving behind him.

He was near the sea, could hear it through the trees beyond the edge of the trees and across the open fields that ran down to the shore marshes and then to the sea and sand itself. He had been working toward the east as much as he could. Edgartown lay that way.

But his arm had stiffened, he was in pain, and the two silent stalkers had not let him make much progress to the east. So far he had evaded them, and night had come to help. But they were experienced hunters, and they knew their territory.

Twice they had passed within feet of the detective as he lay hidden deep under brush. Each time they had guessed their mistake in time to box him in again, to hear the sounds of his attempts to escape them.

It had taken all Shayne's wits to evade this long. Once he had appeared briefly in the open. The shot had come swiftly. It had missed, and Shayne had run on. Now he knew that he did not have much more time. Only the night had come to his aid in the last hour, but he was being inexorably boxed in against the sea and the open marshes.

Many times he had thought of calling out, of telling them that they could not escape. He thought of telling them that his secretary knew where he was and why, that there were other prints of the painting, that killing him would do them, in the end, no good.

But he had not called. He knew, sensed, that the two grim stalkers behind him were far beyond reason. They had killed in Miami to prevent the painting, or Mundt, from returning to the Vineyard. They may have killed an innocent taxi driver, They would not listen now to reason.

They could not listen. They had to go on playing out their game of murder as far as it took them. They had to take it one step at a time. First Shayne, and then they would think about whoever came next. And Mike Shayne still did not know why!

It was a question that did not matter.

The shadowy figures who stalked him knew why, and they were out to kill him.

Now, in the dark of the night, they had him boxed in. They knew the land and he did not. They were working him carefully, preventing him from moving in any direction but the one they wanted him to move in. It was only a matter of time before they forced him out into the open of the shore.

Unarmed, and with one useless arm, Shayne had no longer any choice but to try to attack. Once they forced him to the beach or the marshes he would be helpless. He had to make some move. The logical choice was the smaller of the two—the one with the rifle.

Shayne listened. All was silent. He waited. At last he heard a faint sound close and to his right. That was where the smaller of the two should be. Shayne moved cautiously through the trees and among the outcroppings of rock toward the faint sound.

He moved as quietly as he could. He heard the movement again very close now. Then he lay flat and looked ahead to where the sky beyond the forest was faintly lighter than the ground. He saw a faint shadow. The shadow was standing absolutely still.

Shayne heard the click of a safety going off.

The person had heard him and was peering into the dark. But Shayne had no choice. He watched the figure take one more step toward where he lay—and Shayne gathered all his strength, rose to his knees, and lunged.

The rifle fired.

The bullet seared his injured shoulder.

But it was a high-powered rifle and did not have the impact to stop him.

His heavy frame hurled into the small figure and sent it sprawling. The gun flew away in the night. Gritting his teeth against the pain, Mike Shayne leaped up. The small figure was up. Shayne swung a hard right. The figure went down and out. The hunting cap flew off and Shayne saw that this hunter was a woman.

He had no more time to think. The rifle was somewhere close. Shayne crawled frantically searching for it.

He found it ten feet away lying in the bushes. He reached for it—and stopped.

The big man stood above him against the sky.

The man held a pistol.

Shayne was still three feet from reaching the rifle.

The big man walked closer.

"Shayne?" the big man said. "Mike Shayne?"

Shayne said nothing. He sat there now on the ground and looked into the gaping muzzle of the revolver.

"I'm Sheriff Pauling, Mr. Shayne. I—"

Only then did Shayne see the uniform and the six-pointed cloth star within a shield on the man's uniform.

"Lambert is on the run. You're okay. Now if you can just tell me what this is all about, I'll—"

Shayne reached into his pocket and handed the big man the print of *Seascape In Grey And Red.* The sheriff took the print and shone a flashlight on it. Suddenly the woods were full of men. Someone was picking up the woman.

Shayne passed out then.

XIII

MIKE SHAYNE woke up. He saw the bright sun. He looked toward the window and saw the trees and the distant water. He also saw the smiling face of Sheriff Pauling.

"Good morning," Pauling said. Behind the sheriff he saw the anxious face of Lucy Hamilton.

"Hi, Angel," Shayne said. "How am I?"

"You're fine, Shayne," Pauling said. "Nothing serious. The arm wasn't even broken. A lot of bruises, no more. You slept for twenty-four hours."

"I came as soon as the sheriff called Chief Gentry," Lucy explained, a smile now on her face.

"How—" Shayne began.

"The taxi driver," Pauling said. "When we got out to that wreck, I spotted the shot tire right away. The driver was banged up, but he was alive. He woke up long enough to tell us about you, where you were going and all of that.

"We contacted Mrs. Jones and she identified you. We didn't know you were on a case, of course, but we knew something was peculiar, that shot tire and all. So we organized a search. We got there just in time. Lambert ran when he saw us."

Shayne nodded. He had been lucky. Then he said, "Lambert?"

"Malachi Lambert, he's the man. The girl was his sweetheart, Alice Puskis from Wood's Hole. That's the nearest town on the mainland."

Shayne nodded. "Why did he kill Karl Mundt, Sheriff?"

The sheriff shook his head. "We can't prove he did, and I doubt that we'll ever prove it. But the motive is easy. That painting was it, as I suppose you knew or you wouldn't have been up here."

"I guessed," Shayne said. "I'm still guessing."

"It's simple enough, Shayne," the sheriff said. "About a year ago we had a killing here. Sarah Lambert was beaten to death in her house."

"Malachi's wife?" Shayne said.

The Sheriff nodded. "Right. Of course we tackled Malachi right away. Everyone knew he hated her, had this Puskis girl over to the mainland. Only there weren't any

clues. Malachi insisted it was some prowler, and proved he was in Wood's Hole at the time."

The sheriff scratched his chin. "He did a good job—too good in the end. I mean, he was seen by ten people going off to Wood's Hole. He was seen on the ferry. He was seen in Wood's Hole. The Puskis girl claimed, and swore, that he was with her all night."

Pauling shrugged. "We were sure he did it, but you have to have some proof. We didn't believe the Puskis girl, but with all the witnesses who swore he *went* to Wood's Hole, and saw him there up until a couple of hours before Sarah was killed, we had to have one witness to prove he wasn't in Wood's Hole before we could ever get a conviction.

"We didn't have a witness. Nothing. We figured he took a boat and came back, but we couldn't prove a damn thing. Not until we saw this print of Mundt's painting. It's enough to hang Malachi. You see, Shayne, it's dated—the exact date of the murder!"

Shayne looked at the print again. There it was. The man was clearly recognizable by his clothes and coloring. He was hidden behind a barn. The house was clear. A woman was throwing out some crumbs for birds at the rear door of the house. Off to the left a small motorboat was hidden in a tiny cove.

"It's the exact date. The clothes are exactly what Malachi was wearing in Wood's Hole. Everyone on this island would swear that was Malachi. The boat is clearly recognizable as one owned by Alice Puskis. The time of day is pretty obviously, just about evening. It would have been all a jury needed, Shayne."

Shayne frowned. "But not exact proof without the testimony of Karl Mundt. Karl would have to have sworn to when he painted it."

"That was what Lambert figured. So he went down to Miami, got the painting, destroyed it, and killed Mundt. Like I say, Malachi won't ever talk, and you'd have a hard case to convict him of killing Mundt. But we'll get him for his wife's murder when we catch him.

"But the Puskis girl is talking.

She'll take a deal on an accessory charge, claim she knew nothing of the murders. She told the whole deal. Lambert was sure he had covered the last possibility of being caught for his wife's murder. He never even guessed about color photographs of the paintings."

Shayne was not satisfied. "One thing, Sheriff. How the devil did he find out about the painting?"

"He saw Mundt up on the hill *after* he had killed his wife. The Puskis girl says that what he saw was Mundt leaving with his canvas. He didn't know who Mundt was, and at that time he could not go around asking questions. We didn't discover the body for a couple of days. We kept it pretty quiet a day or so.

"Mundt was just a summer visitor. He didn't read our paper, and he left a few days later. I guess he never even knew about the murder of Sarah Lambert. I doubt if he would have connected his painting to it anyway, he didn't know he was painting the farm of Malachi Lambert."

"But Malachi did?" Shayne asked.

"Well, he knew someone had been painting. But the Puskis girl says Malachi wasn't worried, he knew Sarah had made no sound when she died. So Malachi forgot about it, and figured he had us beat. Only we didn't give up and I guess he got nervous.

"Then, about a month ago, he heard about the painting by sheer accident. Just a pure chance, that's all."

A sheer accident, Shayne thought. So apparently Karl Mundt had died through the cruelest trick of fate.

The sheriff went on. "Malachi was doing some work around The Jones Inn. Mrs. Jones just happened to mention that a man from Miami was coming back. And she mentioned that this Karl Mundt was a painter. She even showed Malachi one of Mundt's paintings. Malachi took a look and panicked, I guess. You see, it was a good, clear painting of the farm next to Malachi's farm."

The sheriff looked out the window. "The Puskis girl said Malachi was scared to death. He made her go with him to Miami. All they had was Mundt's home address. Mrs. Mundt gave the girl the gallery address. They bought the paintings and burned the one they had to. Then Malachi watched Mundt, and finally killed him.

"They came back feeling safe again. Then they heard about you coming up. Mike Shayne from Miami! I guess Malachi checked and found out who you were—and you gave Mundt as a reference. So they gunned for you in New York and here."

There was a silence in the hospital room. Shayne sighed wearily.

"A man kills his wife, and ends up gunning down strangers all

over the country. Murder leads to massacre to cover up."

"That's the way it is, Shayne," Sheriff Pauling said. "But we'll get him."

Shayne nodded. They would get him. He felt tired. He slept then, and, soon after, went back to Miami with Lucy. He was quiet all the way down to Miami. When he reported to Frieda Mundt he used the same words.

"They'll get Lambert, Mrs. Mundt."

"Yes," the woman said looking at her hands.

"At least you know now. They'll never convict him of killing Karl, but they'll get him for the other murder."

"No," Frieda Mundt said. "They'll never prove he killed my Karl, will they?" She stared at Mike Shayne. "But there was a reason. We know that, don't we? There was a human reason. It wasn't just chance, no not just stupid chance. Not just a quirk of chaos without meaning. Fear, that was it. Fear is human."

The woman trailed off. Shayne left her there still talking to herself. But she would feel better soon. She would go on living.

Now, knowing that there had been a human reason for the murder of Karl, she might even forget someday.

Mike Shayne would not forget, ever.

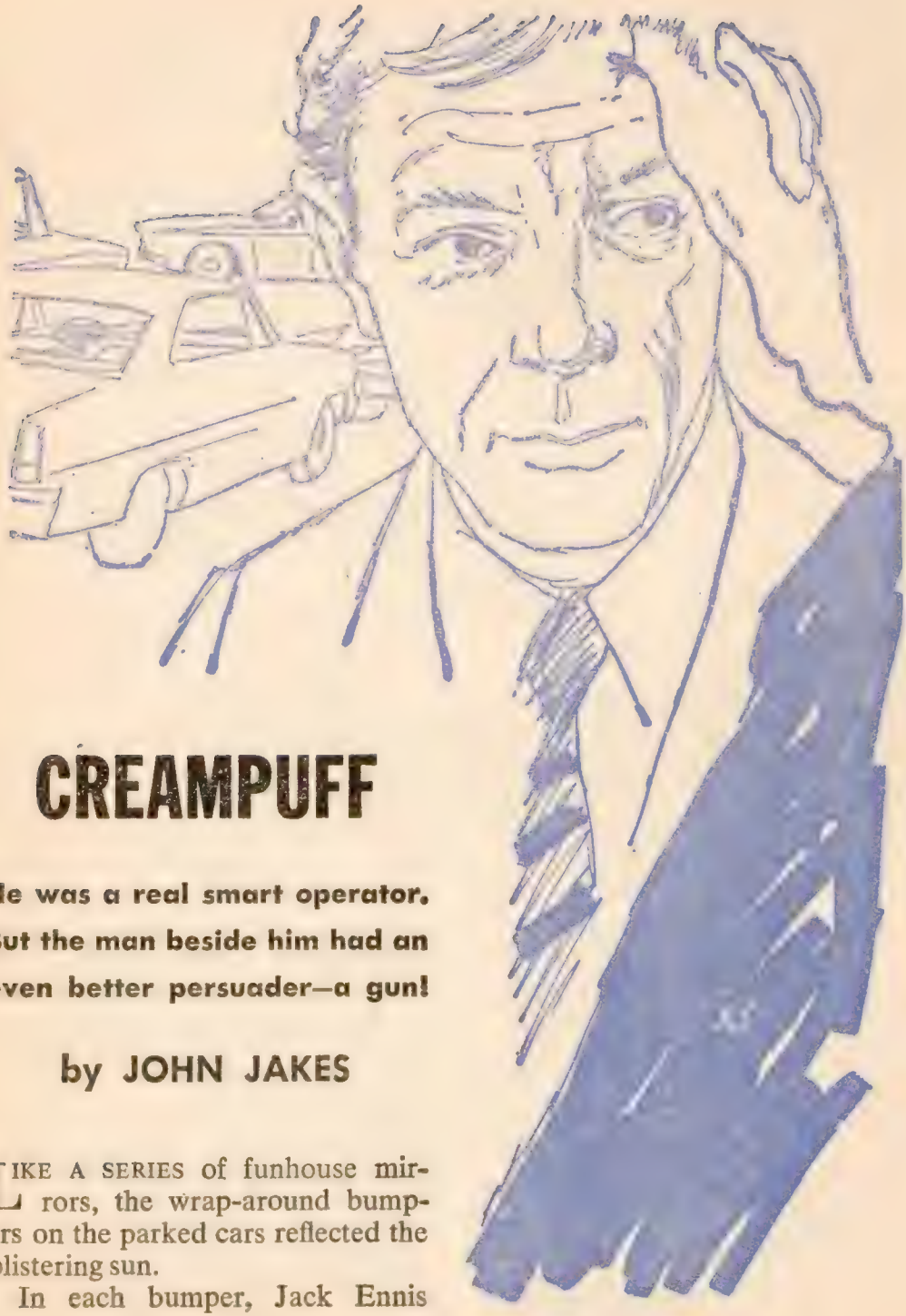
In the Next Issue—Complete and Exclusively Yours—

HUSTLE DEATH

A Thrilling New Mike Shayne Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Alive, he had been only a down-at-the-heels tinhorn sport. Dead, he was to plunge Mike Shayne into perhaps the deadliest game of murder in all his bullet-studded career. For somewhere, everywhere, out in the hostile night gangland guns were in wait for the one private eye who had promised to come out there—and fight them at their own game of death!



CREAMPUFF

He was a real smart operator. But the man beside him had an even better persuader—a gun!

by JOHN JAKES

LIKE A SERIES of funhouse mirrors, the wrap-around bumpers on the parked cars reflected the blistering sun.

In each bumper, Jack Ennis

saw a distortion of himself. Head out of shape. Arms too long. Legs foreshortened to squatness. Ennis blinked, there in the doorway of the dealership. When he opened his eyes, the dwarf images reflected in the bumpers had not gone away.

Neither had the sick feeling in the pit of his belly. Nor the realization of the finality in what Steve Sharkey, the sales manager, had told him just moments ago before slamming the door to his air-conditioned office.

"We might as well face facts, Jack. You haven't been even close to meeting the quota for six months now."

Weakly, defensively, Ennis tried to alibi: "But Steve! I been having personal problems—"

Sharkey, who was the brother-in-law of the owner of the dealership, shrugged. "Personal problems don't cut no ice in Detroit, Jack."

"This is damned unfair." Ennis' flashily handsome, not-quite-forty-face flushed. "I get all the paperwork done right on time. You know how the rest of those clowns always stall around. I'm always on time for a customer appointment. I'm—"

Sharkey passed a plump hand wearily over his bald skull. "Yeah, I got to give you that, Jack. You're prompt following up. And you're prompt with the paperwork. But hell, that doesn't change the fact you haven't sold one car in over three weeks."

Nervously Ennis reached for a smoke in the inside pocket of his plaid sports jacket. His bow tie hung askew. A diamond on the little finger of his right hand glittered as he lit up. "As soon as I get things straightened out with my wife, Steve—".

Sadly but firmly, Sharkey shook his head. "Cut it out, Jack. We both know your wife walked out on you a month ago."

Jack Ennis' cheeks darkened. "Which one of those bums on the lot has been talking behind my back? What kind of rotten rumors have they been feeding you, Steve?"

Sharkey's lips pursed, annoyed. "Jack, I'm telling you, cut it out. Stop making excuses. Sure, I hear things. Hell, that's my job. But maybe if you'd stop kidding yourself, face up to the fact that you haven't given a hoot about the work for a long time, admit you spend too much time chasing after the girlies and hitting the bottle—"

Sharkey's voice dropped off momentarily. He tried to smile. "What my men do after hours is none of my affair. I could care less." Sharkey stabbed the air with an index finger. "Just so long as you move the wheels when you're on the lot. You haven't been moving them, Jack."

Seated in the visitor's chair, Jack Ennis began to turn cold. He tried

not to show his alarm, because, in a fleeting moment of self-honesty, he knew his chances of landing a job at another lot were nil. Most of the dealers in the city knew him.

And if he lost this job, then how in the hell would he keep up with the payments to Vernie, who was living with her mother in Michigan? More important, how would he manage to keep on seeing Betty Bart, over whom the trouble with Vernie had started in the first place?

Betty was an exciting little tramp, barely turned twenty-one, with a delectable mouth, a way of goading him with her eyes, a craving for nice things, nice places. Betty drove him wild. He positively had to keep seeing her. But he knew the score. The moment he stopped coming around with invitations to nice places, with little gifts, she'd dump him.

"Give me a chance, Steve," Jack said. "I'll do better, I promise."

Sharkey sighed. "That's what I'm giving you, a chance. Paul—" That was his brother-in-law, Paul Cartwright, the owner. "—Paul wanted me to fire you straight off. I said no, I'd give you a second chance. I don't like to fire any man, no matter how—"

Sharkey scratched his chin, thought better of it, continued: "—no matter what, without he gets a second chance. But this is it, Jack. Either you sell three cars by Monday morning, or you're through."

Ennis leaped up. "Three cars! This is Friday afternoon. That's an unreasonable—"

"Isn't it better than being canned?" Sharkey said. He relaxed again. "Hell, Jack, we've got our big promotion going in both the papers, starting tonight. We'll be open Sunday all day. I don't care how you do it, just sell three sets of wheels."

Sharkey rose, to indicate the interview was over. "I'm taking off in an hour. Going to drive up to Toronto for the weekend with the family. So it's up to you, Jack. All I'm telling you is, I want to see the reports of three sales on this desk Monday morning sharp. Got that?"

Ennis blurted, "You're against me too, aren't you? Just like all the rest of them?"

Instead of anger, Sharkey showed disappointment. "Don't you ever learn, Ennis?"

Sharkey started to close the door. Ennis had no choice but to leave.

So here he was, standing in the doorway of the main showroom of Cartwright's Car-O-Rama, with his own face reflecting in all the bumpers of the cars parked at the edge of the lot.

Beyond the lot, traffic streamed both ways on the four-lane highway leading through the suburb. Ennis blinked again, reached for a cigarette. He cursed to himself. They were all wrong, every one of them. They didn't understand.

So what if he liked the girls and a little drink? Was that a crime? His eyes began to shift back and forth across the sun-glaring tops of the parked cars, watching for customers. On one hand, he was inclined to tell Sharkey to go to hell. On the other, he was plain scared. If he lost this job—Ennis winced.

He'd fix Steve Sharkey for what he'd just done. Ennis didn't know how he'd fix him; that would come later; but his mind was made up. Of course, in order to fix him, he had to stay on the payroll.

He turned the notion of revenge over and over in his mind. Mingled with flashes of Betty Bart's face, it got him thinking about business again.

A two-year-old compact sedan with rocker panels rusted clean through from the winter's salt rolled into the lot. Ennis saw a white-haired man driving, a white-haired woman beside him. Quickly he ditched his cigarette, started for the car with a smile pasted in place.

He was halfway to his goal when Phil Annixter appeared in the big open double doors of the service garage. Ennis scowled. Annixter, really hopping, beat him to the sedan by three steps.

Ennis rounded the hood.

"Annixter," he whispered, "you take off. I saw—"

Annixter gave him a contemptuous smile. "Sorry, Jack." Suavely Annixter opened the door on the driver's side. "May I help you folks?"

Ennis felt his fist doubling. "Annixter, you better let me have—" He began. Then he heard a cough, turned.

He wilted. Steve Sharkey had come out, was examining a station wagon parked near the showroom entrance. Sharkey ran his finger up and down the fender paint, up and down. Frustrated, furious, Ennis retreated.

Like the rest, Annixter was out to get him.

Sure enough forty-five minutes later, Ennis glanced into one of the salesmen's cubicles and saw Annixter, smiling broadly, hand a fountain pen to the white-haired man, who signed the purchase agreement. Out in the broiling lot, Ennis fumed, sweated, searched for prospective customers.

Customers there seemed to be, every half hour or so during most of the morning and early afternoon, but somehow Ennis seemed to be a second or so late in catching them before one of the other salesmen made the initial contact.

Ennis began to suspect the salesmen were moving faster by pre-arrangement. It was part of the plot to dump him. Consequently, when the battered five-year-old hardtop minus two hubcaps and with a broken antenna pulled in, Ennis ran like the wind.

"Help you, sir?" Ennis said, skidding to a stop in the gravel.

The sun beat like a hammer on the top of his head. He mustn't lose this one. He mustn't! A car today, a car tomorrow, one Sunday—he had to perform. He extended his hand, forced a smile. "Hi, my name's Jack Ennis. What can I show you today?"

The man climbed out. He was in his middle twenties, heavily built. He had a thatch of straw-colored hair, rather close-set blue eyes, a square jaw.

"Uh, Bill Smith," he said, shaking. His grip was hard, tough. Factory worker, Ennis figured. Not too bright.

Smith shielded his brows from the sun's glare. "Well, my brother and me were kind of hoping to go halves on something a little newer than this bus."

Ennis glanced into the empty car. "Your brother?"

"Yeah," Smith said with a smile. "We're both bachelors, you see. He works days, I work nights. So I told him I'd do some shopping around, then give him a call if I found anything. I was kind of thinking about a hardtop." Smith started to amble back toward the used car lot. "One car's all we need between us for dates because of the different working hours," he explained.

Ennis pointed to a year-old fire engine red hardtop with fake knock-off wheel discs. He knew the car to be a mechanical bomb. "There's a real beauty, full power equipment. Got whitewalls and everything. Like to take a look?"

"Well," Smith said, "I don't think I'm crazy about red but—it doesn't hurt to look."

However, Bill Smith decided he didn't like the pronounced transmission hump in the front seat. That set Ennis to thinking desperately about the current model year. This year the hump had been lowered. Ennis had sized Smith up as an easy mark, ready to be hotboxed into something good, but locating the something good was the problem.

Suddenly Ennis had an inspiration. "How about a convertible?"

The burly Smith started to shake his head. "I dunno. Convertibles are usually higher priced, aren't they?"

"Not this one. This one's a demo. In fact, it's my own car."

What a great idea! Besides the India Blue convertible which Ennis drove was another dog. The transmission in it was about to go, though the car had less than 6,000 miles on it.

"Come on over here and at least take a look. You look like the convertible type to me anyway," Ennis laughed, feeling he was on to something.

They approached the car. "Isn't she a beauty? Matching India Blue top and vinyl interior. That's a swell dark blue. Doesn't fade. A real class automobile. Doesn't stand out like a sore thumb like

so many convertibles. Tell you the truth, I don't care for red cars either."

Bill Smith opened the door, slid inside. He ran his hand over the vinyl front seat. Then he worked the automatic drive lever a few times. Meantime Ennis had run around and opened the hood.

"It's got the big motor," he called. "The big V-8. She's a real creampuff, I can guarantee it. I wouldn't be getting rid of her," he improvised, the lies coming very smoothly now that things were going well, "except that here at Cartwright's there's a policy that all the salesmen have to drive the complete line every year, and I've had this baby three months. I'm due for a wagon next week."

Smith came around the front, stared into the oil-reeking motor with its huge round air cleaner from which the white paint was already flaking and rusting away. Slowly Smith straightened up. Ennis, tortured by tension at this point, saw that the burly young man was smiling.

"I kinda like it."

Ennis couldn't help grabbing Smith's arm. "The keys are in her. Why not take a drive and try her out?"

Then Smith shook his head. "This is a fifty-fifty deal, remember? My brother might not go for it. But I like it."

Ennis' belly went cold. Was he being brushed off? No, Smith seemed genuinely interested as he added, "Look, let me pick up my brother when he gets off work and we'll drive back and take a look."

Quickly Ennis whipped out a pad, a pencil. "Why don't you let me save you a trip? I'll bring the car around to your place. How about tonight? The dinner hour? Where do you live?"

Smith started walking, glancing at his watch. "It wouldn't be too much trouble to bring it around?"

"Of course not, of course not," Ennis said. "Just give me your address."

Smith paused, gnawed his lip. "I really ought to give my brother a call first. Tell you what. I'll call him, and if he's not loused up when he gets off work, I'll telephone you here. Could I have a card or something?"

Eagerly Ennis gave him one of his engraved cards, watched him climb into his hardtop and drive away. Abruptly Ennis noticed Phil Annixter gazing at him from nearby.

"Lost another one, huh, Jack?" Annixter said.

Ennis' temper cracked. He made an obscene sign with his right hand, started to say something vulgar, but Annixter, chuckling, had already gone back inside the service garage.

I'll show you, all of you, Ennis thought. He was now more firmly convinced than ever that there was a conspiracy operating against

him, a conspiracy masterminded by Paul Cartwright and Steve Sharkey, and subscribed to by the rest of the salesmen. Well, it wouldn't work. He'd show them.

All afternoon, as customers became scant in the blistering heat, Ennis grew more and more nervous. Toward four o'clock, he realized he'd been had. Smith would not call back. And he'd thought his luck was changing!

For a while there, he'd been sure he'd gotten that jerk Smith interested in a car that had been a factory lemon from the beginning. Now he realized he'd been kidding himself.

Ennis was pacing up and down in front of the showroom, smoking the first cigarette from his third pack of the day, when the loudspeaker connected to the switchboard boomed, "Telephone, Mr. Jack Ennis, Mr. Jack Ennis, telephone, please."

Ennis ran for all he was worth.

He was out of breath when he answered: "Hello, hello?"

"Mr. Ennis? This is Bill Smith. My brother Hank would like to see the car."

"That's great! Where shall I bring it?"

"Well, the problem is, Hank's got a date fifteen minutes after he gets off work and this girl he's going with—well, she raises hell whenever he's late, so we were wondering. Could you possibly meet us right when Hank gets off work? I could be there, and we could spend a few minutes looking over the car before he takes off for the date. Then maybe you and I could talk price."

Ennis nodded. "Sure, sure. Just tell me where."

"Well," Smith said, "Hank gets off at six-thirty sharp. The Corona Supermarket at Panoramic Shopping Plaza. Know where that is?"

"Right, right," Ennis said, marking *6:30* in big block letters on his pad.

"I'll be waiting for you out in front, okay? Hank promised to be on time. That's six-thirty."

"Yes, sir, six-thirty on the dot. My pleasure," Jack Ennis said. He hung up beaming.

He couldn't believe it. His luck, at long, long last, really was beginning to change.

Laughing and whistling, he loafed around the lot until shortly after six. There were no new customers that came his way, but that didn't concern him. He'd hooked Bill Smith for sure. And he knew he was going to make those three

cars by Monday, he had a feeling. Once he made those three cars, he'd stick around and before he left this dump for good, he'd fix Steve Sharkey and the whole crew. Somehow, he'd fix them.

The sun slanted low behind the suburban hills, casting long, shimmering shadows, when Ennis drove the convertible into the huge Panoramic Plaza lot at precisely 6:29. They couldn't say Jack Ennis wasn't prompt. Even Sharkey had admitted it was a virtue.

Ennis had left the convertible's top in the up position because of the sun's heat. Then too, buyers got more involved with a car if they could work all the switches and gadgets for themselves. Ennis was still sweating, but more from excitement than any other cause.

Although it was Friday evening, the numbers of cars parked in the yellow-striped slots were few because it was the dinner hour. Ennis drove slowly toward the wide, tinted glass front of The Corona Supermarket. Scanning the front, Ennis spotted a man leaning there smoking, a man large enough to be Bill Smith.

As Ennis pulled up along the curb, he noticed that despite the warmth of the evening, Smith was wearing a light jacket and cap. Smith glanced at his watch, hastily tossed his smoke away. He circled the hood to the driver's side. With some pride, Ennis noticed that the dash clock, the only thing in the convertible which had worked properly from the start, read 6:30 exactly.

"Hi, Bill!" Ennis said. "Right on—"

"Shove over so I can try her out," Smith said, already in the car.

Startled, Ennis moved over. He had left the shift in neutral, the handbrake on. Now Smith shifted into *D* for drive, smacked off the handbrake rather roughly with his left foot, held the car stopped with the brake pedal. Ennis frowned, Tense, watchful.

To make conversation, Ennis said, "Your brother Hank still planning to join us?"

"Yeah, he'll be along any—" Quickly Smith cut off the sentence. Ennis turned his head to see what Smith was staring at, and got the shock of his life.

Bill Smith's brother Hank was coming, all right. He was coming not from The Corona Supermarket, but from the building right next door, a much smaller establishment Ennis had not noticed before. The letters on the glass read, *Panoramic Branch,* FIRST CITY SAVINGS AND LOAN.

From this doorway, Bill Smith's brother came charging, a leather bag in one hand and—Ennis goggled—a gun in the other.

Through the building's windows, Ennis glimpsed several alarmed-looking Savings and Loan

tellers and customers. The place, like all local banks, was open for business from five to eight every Friday evening to take care of the weekly paycheck trade.

With a crash, a lurch, Bill Smith's brother was inside the car, had the door slammed, the gun poked into Ennis' ribs. "Go, Ralph, clear out!"

Bill Smith hit the accelerator. The car rocketed forward, already doing sixty by the time it ripped from the plaza lot after nearly sideswiping a bread delivery truck.

"What—what the hell is this?" Ennis exclaimed. The two men did not look at all like brothers.

"Just be quiet," Bill, or Ralph said. "We don't want to hurt you if we don't have to."

Now Jack Ennis began to shudder. The man on his right said, "No trouble, Ralph. I wasn't so hot for this idea of yours at first, but it worked out okay." He patted the bag. "Got between sixty and seventy grand in here, I'd say."

"I told you they said this guy was always right on time," Bill, or Ralph, said, indicating Ennis.

Now Ennis tried to speak: "Who—who told you?"

"Met one of the mechanics from your place in a bar," the burly young man said. He was driving expertly at top speed along the suburban road. Neat row houses flashed by, all the owners indoors at this hour. Far ahead, Ennis thought he saw a flicker of the huge green signboards which indicated the approaches to the Expressway running north and south past the city.

The burly young man went on: "Actually, it was bumping into that mechanic that gave me the idea. The last thing I wanted to do was drive my own car on this job. So I figured if we could set up a sucker like you—one who always got places on time, that was important—we'd have a nice, clean buggy to take us away. And, like you said, it's not too flashy, either."

Seeing how horribly he had been trapped, Ennis gasped, "But —what if I'd been late?"

The burly young man shrugged. "Chance you take. No worse than going into a savings and loan with a gun. There are a lot of woods behind that plaza. We could of hid there if you hadn't showed. We figured it was a possibility, a traffic jam or something. Hiding out would have been rough, but we would of made out okay. This way's better. It was worth taking the chance to get a fresh car free. You don't take chances, you don't get any place. Know what I mean?"

Ennis blinked, blinked. "Where are you going to let me off?"

"In Canada," said the man on his right, lighting a smoke.

"Canada!"

"We'll be long gone before they catch up to us," the man continued. "And if you don't make any squeals when you drive us

over the border—you'll have this gun in your ribs when we go over, too—and if you act real pleasant, we might drop you off in Ottawa or Toronto next Monday or Tuesday. So just relax."

Ennis managed to control his shaking. That is, he did until he remembered Steve Sharkey, who would be waiting for the report of three car sales Monday morning.

"You can't do this!" he began, wildly. "It's not fair—My God, I'm no criminal. If I'm gone all weekend—"

"Listen, pal," said the burly young man, slowing for the approach to the Expressway that led to the Canadian border less than one hundred miles to the north. "Just figure you're lucky to be living. I know what kind of a crate you tried to palm off on me. Used to work in a garage myself. I knew the minute I fiddled with the shift lever that the transmission on this baby was on its way out. So don't make any big noises about getting in trouble over this, see? Whatever happens to you, good or bad—pal, you got it coming."

For the life of him, Jack Ennis couldn't think of a single comeback.

READ—This Great New Spy Novel in the March Issue of:

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

THE HUNGRY WORLD AFFAIR

A Brand New SOLO and ILLYA Complete Novel

ROBERT HART DAVIS

It's the king of all spy-action magazines, the top of the TY spy show ratings—and one sampling of its stories will tell you why! Each issue, a brand new U.N.C.L.E. full-length novel! Each issue a prime selection of the world's great new stories!

An Unusual Novelet of Chilling Suspense

THE BOY WITH THE LONG BLOND HAIR

They were crazy, lost kids. And from them he must pick the bad one—even if the leader turned out to be his son!

by DAVID MUTCH

WHEN TOM ROON awoke he wondered what small night sound had done it this time. He was as light-sleeping as a cat. His wife Elsie said it was because he never allowed himself to be just a person. Twenty-four hours a day he was a cop.

As he shoved his feet into slippers, he realized it had been the side door being gently opened and closed that had awakened him.

He scowled at the luminous dial of the clock on the night table. Quarter after one, Sunday morning. Which meant that Bill was fifteen minutes late. The boy always seemed to step a little over any deadline you gave him.

Kids. They drove you crazy sometimes.

Roon went out into the hall. The boy, in stocking feet, had just reached the foot of the stairs.

He smiled uncertainly.

"Sorry, Dad, I'm a little late. I ran all the way from the bus stop."

"Okay." He had already decided not to make an issue of the fifteen minutes. You can't run a

home like an army barracks. He had no doubt the boy had hurried. He was panting and there was sweat in the fine soft hairs above his upper lip.

Roon asked mildly, "At the Inn tonight?"

He immediately regretted asking. It provoked one of those lightning-swift emotions, no doubt perfectly natural, yet so annoying. Self-pity? Hostility? And what was a father supposed to do? If you asked your teenager where he was spending his time, he resented it. If you didn't, you weren't doing your duty.

"Dad, I told both you and Mom that Olaf and me were going there tonight."

Roon smiled. "Have a good time?"

Bill grinned. "Wonderful!"

"Good. Go to bed now."

The boy tiptoed upstairs, followed every foot of the way by his father's eyes, first fond, then thoughtful. The boy's thick black hair was getting shaggy again. Which meant another battle of the haircut.

The very thought of that was enough to make Tom Roon grope in his dressing gown for a cigarette. Haircut. What a foolish thing for a father and son to war over. A war without a victor. Bill's hair was too long to suit his father and too short to suit himself.

Roon finished his cigarette in the darkened living room. He smiled. At least his kid's hair wasn't like young Olaf's. He frowned. And what was Mr. Knudson doing letting Olaf wear his blond hair so girlishly long? Sure, you had to give kids some leeway, modern teenage hair styles being what they were. But not that much.

He gazed out onto the deserted street, trying as always to be fair. Teenagers by their very nature were a problem to their parents. If they weren't at least a little rebellious there was something wrong with them. Both Olaf and Bill, inseparable buddies, always managed to pass in school and stayed out of trouble.

Like all teenagers back to caveman days, they pained their fathers dreadfully at times, but they were good kids.

The skin on his face tightened in a sudden flash of fear, his cop's mind reminding him how often he had heard white-faced parents at the station house wail, "But he's always been such a good boy!" Or girl. No parent ever knew for sure. And teenagers were getting into more and more trouble, and more serious kinds of trouble, every day, everywhere, even in the quiet suburb of Wakefield Village.

But again he tried to be fair. Despite their idiotic haircuts, crazy clothes and insane music, the proportion of teenagers who weren't getting into trouble was far greater than the proportion who were. And a single reading of any newspaper

proved that grownups weren't setting too wonderful an example.

And worrying without cause—a sign of creeping old age? He touched his thickened waist, his balding head, for an instant envious of his son's full head of thick black hair, of his swift slimness. A little jealousy involved in the worrying?

He felt at peace. Bill was safely in bed.

He was almost asleep when the extension phone by the bed rang.

"Well, the boys are up to their usual fun and games." The caustic voice of Chief Cartman. "Some sweet mother's darling has just held up the service station at the corner of Elm and Willoughby and slugged the old man out there."

"I'll get right out there." Roon was used to both the voice and the attitude toward teenagers.

"No!" Carman's emphatic tone startled Roon. "You come down here first."

"Why? Is there something different about this holdup?"

"There certainly is. So you come down here first."

The connection was broken.

From the bed behind him, Elsie said, "What is it? Your voice sounded a little strange."

"Teenage holdup. And what parent, even a cop, doesn't instinctively worry a little when he hears that?" He added quickly, "Bill's home."

"Which doesn't matter. He'd never get involved in anything like that."

"No." And Roon the parent believed, while Roon the cop remembered that no parent ever knows for sure.

On his way out of the house he almost tripped over a pair of pointed-toed suede shoes. He scowled at the ceiling, then at the shoes. Whatever teenage fashions were elsewhere, pointed-toed suede shoes were all the rage in Wakefield Village. Was there a boy for miles around who would wear anything else? Crazy fashions. Kids!

His cop's mind suddenly asked a terrifying question: Hadn't Bill been in a terrible hurry getting home? Like a scared kid on the run?

He growled softly and called himself a fool. There were times when he hated his cop's mind.

Cartman's office had modern office furnishings, with two startling exceptions, the age-darkened, battered oak desk and the creaky old swivel chair—all, Cartman often said bitterly, he'd been allowed to save from the senseless destruction of the good old station house.

Cartman himself looked out of place in the office. A shriveled man whose sallow face wore the bitter and bewildered expression of an old man forced to live in an age he hates and cannot change.

Roon and Cartman didn't like each other. Neither tried to hide the fact.

"So why here first?" Roon said. "What have we got to go on?"

Cartman smiled unpleasantly. "Description of the boy. Long blond hair. Sound familiar? Like that freak I see your kid with so often?"

Roon's heart thudded, but he kept his fear from showing. "Kid with long blond hair. Anything else?"

"A most unusual witness in this day and age—a sixteen-year-old boy who you don't have to look twice at to know he's a boy."

"Okay, okay. Who is he? What did he see?"

"Name's Harold Warren. Like your son and his freak friend, he attends the new juvenile delinquent center. Excuse me. High school."

"How about laying off the younger generation long enough to get to the point?"

"Suits me. The description the Warren boy gives us—and it's backed up by the old man who was slugged—fits your son's freak friend exactly. Point enough?"

Roon kept tight control of himself. "The boy's name is Olaf Knudson. He's not the only kid with long blond hair among all the thousands of teenagers in Metro."

"Oh I know. Some of the others are even girls."

Tom Roon let the crack go by. "Anything from the old man who was robbed and slugged?"

Cartman frowned. "Not all I'd like. It happened in the garage section of the service station. Mr. Aberhart had turned off most of the lights for the night. He's sure of the long blond hair, but he can tell us nothing about the face. The hair is all the Warren boy is certain about too."

"So a kid with long blond hair. No proof it was Olaf."

Cartman's sarcasm returned full force. "Not at the moment, Mr. Defense Attorney. I wonder where I could find a good detective who might get me some proof?"

Roon still kept his temper. It wasn't easy. "I'll go out to the service station right now."

"Will you?" Cartman's eyes narrowed, with both shrewdness and fear. "Maybe I should call in the holdup squad from downtown. I can do that."

"Because my son's best friend is apparently a suspect, you think I might go blind?"

Cartman tapped his age-darkened desk. "All I care about is holding on here for another six months till I get my pension. A kid slugging an old man is just a childish prank these days, but it'll be in all the newspapers Monday. If it isn't solved it might be the excuse those big city cops downtown have been looking for to ease me out. Those big city cops have a high opinion of you, by the way, but you were brought up in the city yourself."

Roon grinned. "And that's awful."

"Anything from the city is aw-

ful." A wistful expression appeared on the sallow face. "What a wonderful place Wakefield Village used to be before we were swallowed up by that cancer. When there was miles and miles of green fields between us and the city. When our kids had some manners and some decency."

Roon felt a flash of pity for the old man, but he said, "The holdup squad from downtown? Or me?"

Cartman stared hard at him. "You," he said finally. "Because if I called in the holdup squad right away, that might be excuse enough to ease me out."

He shook his fist at Tom Roon. "But there better not be any cover-up for your son's freak friend."

"There'll be no cover-up for anybody." Roon spoke calmly, but he was afraid. What if it was Olaf? What if—no parent could ever be sure—Bill were involved?

"Where's the old man now?" he asked.

"At the hospital."

"The Warren boy?"

"At home. His mother assures me that he'll wait up for you."

"I'll go to the service station first. Then the hospital. Then the Warren boy."

"And when are you going to get around to talking to that kid your son hangs around with?"

"Maybe I won't talk to him at all," Roon said evenly." The kid I want to talk to is the guilty boy, no matter who he is."

"All right, but you just be sure that you're talking to the guilty boy, and he's talking to you with the right answers, before the newspapers come out on Monday."

DRIVING TO THE service station, Tom Roon reflected that the odds

were long against it being Olaf. The sketchy description would fit many another boy. But he would conduct this investigation, he told himself grimly, like any other, let the chips fall where they may.

When he was close to the corner of Elm and Willoughby and saw the service station ahead, he did a rare thing for him—he felt a flash of panic.

The place the kids called the Inn was a new place and he had known only that it was located somewhere along Willoughby. Now he saw exactly where it was: diagonally opposite the service station. Which shortened the odds against Olaf. And maybe against Bill too.

He pulled the car to the curb. Call Cartman? Ask for the holdup squad from downtown? Plead pos-

sible personal involvement? Everybody would understand.

No, never in his life had he asked somebody else to do his job for him.

He drove into the service station, identified himself to the two uniformed cops who had answered the call and stayed on. He was surprised to notice that it was the older man of the team, a greyed middle-ager, who was showing a rookie-like nervousness.

That cop scowled across the street at the Inn. "My little girl was there just an hour ago. But what are you supposed to do? You can't keep 'em locked in their rooms till they're twenty-one." He sighed, then told Roon what was known about the holdup.

Old Mr. Aberhart had been putting things away for the night, specifically bringing in tires which had been on display and stacking them in the dimly-lit area behind the grease pit.

He had not been conscious of the kid until the kid shoved the gun in his back. Then, in unthinking rage, the old man had turned quickly about and tried to swing at the boy, only to be struck immediately on the temple with the gun. In that instant of seeing before being hit, the old man was sure only of the long blond hair.

He had fallen, not quite unconscious but very dazed, and had stayed face down while the boy ran into the office and looted the till. Then he had crawled to the phone.

"One final thing," the older cop said. "Aberhart says that when he was hit the boy's hand brushed across his face, and the hand had a glove on it. No fingerprints."

"How's the old man?"

The cop grinned. "More mad than hurt. He's tough. We sent him to the hospital as a precaution, but I think you'll be able to talk to him tonight. He wants to talk to you. He's really mad. Says he's always been good to the kids and now they've let him down."

Roon forced himself to ask, "Anything about another kid being involved?"

"Not a thing."

Roon felt some relief; he didn't let it show. "You talked to this Warren boy?"

"Yeah." He pointed at the middle of the intersection. "He saw the kid with long blond hair run right out there, stayed there for a couple of seconds." The cop's finger moved right. "Then down the right side of the Inn. There's a back door down there."

Roon studied the intersection. It was brightly lit on all four corners. He scowled. Why should a kid who had been smart enough to wear gloves during the holdup not only run out there into all that light, but stand there in such plain view for a couple of seconds? Panic, perhaps.

The cop was thinking out loud. "I'd swear she's a good kid, but what kind of characters is she may-

be getting mixed up with? Kids!"

Roon told himself it was no time now to ponder on that subject. He had to think only like a cop. The lights were still on in the Inn. He went over.

He was met at the door by a young man with a shock of bright red hair, a freckled face that Roon could tell was usually good-humored, but was now solemn and worried.

Roon took a hard look at the big room. A dance floor, tables, and chairs along two sides, a refreshment bar, a little band stand. The place had a freshly painted, bright clean look about it.

They sat on stools at the refreshment bar.

"What can you tell me about the holdup, Mr. McGowan?"

"Only what I heard. That it was the work of a boy with long blond hair. He's supposed to have run down the side of this place, and maybe come in the back door."

"Did he come in the back door?"

McGowan took a moment to answer. "I don't think so. But maybe. The kids come and go all evening. There was a big crowd tonight."

"Long blond hair. Did you see more than one boy here tonight with hair like that?"

Again McGowan was slow to answer, and then only grudgingly. "I can remember just one. I think you know who."

"I know," Roon said with a harshness he hadn't intended. Telling yourself to think only like a cop was easy. Doing it wasn't.

McGowan said thoughtfully, "This isn't evidence, I suppose, but I'd like to say it anyway. Managing these teenage places, you get a feeling about kids, what ones are in trouble or headed for it. I don't think Olaf would have anything to do with a holdup. Your son either, by the way."

Roon felt swift relief and gratitude, followed instantly by annoyance. It was no time now to think like a doting parent.

"Give or take a minute or two," he said, "the holdup time was twelve-thirty. We can scratch Olaf as a suspect if we can be positive that he was here all evening and didn't leave even for a couple of minutes."

McGowan sighed heavily. "Kids. They're so restless. They come and go all evening. I just don't know." He looked squarely at Roon. "I'm not lying to you. I wouldn't want this thing to get out of your hands. Having a teenager of your own, you should have some—well, sympathy for them."

Roon thought, Sympathy? Sure. But for a kid who would rob and slug an old man I have no sympathy at all.

He said, "Can you tell me anything at all that might help?"

McGowan thought for a moment. "Not a thing."

Roon used McGowan's phone to phone the hospital. Yes, Mr. Aber-

hart was there and awake. The nurse sounded annoyed with Mr. Aberhart.

At the hospital, Roon discovered that the young doctor was annoyed with the old man too. "Some people haven't got sense enough to lie down. There's no concussion, apparently, but at his age in particular, he should be in bed with sedation. Well here we are. Just open the door and march in. Did you bring a whip and a chair?"

It was a very little room. The old man, his head bandaged, was in a wheel chair. Immediately, his mouth jerked open.

Aberhart swore at Roon. "What's been keeping you? And have you caught that kid?"

Roon admitted he hadn't. "Tell me everything you can remember. Take lots of time."

In a voice that quavered with anger, the old man did. Roon didn't learn anything.

Then he was embarrassed to see old man's eyes moisten. "I go out of my way to be good to kids, try to understand 'em, and now this." The tears were brushed away angrily. "You catch that kid, you hear? Sure, when I was a kid we did lots of crazy things, but we didn't hit an old man with a gun. What's getting into kids these days?"

That subject, again and again and again, Tom Roon thought.

"But you catch the right kid," the old man went on. "Now that Olaf—kind of goofy, sure, but I don't think it was him. It might have been, though. That's the kind of hair I saw. If only I'd got a look at that kid's face."

"You sure you've told me everything?"

The old man swore. "No I ain't! What do you think I've been sitting in this chair racking my brains for?" His manner changed very suddenly; he looked a little frightened. "There ain't a thing wrong with my memory. It was that whack on the head that did it. I wasn't quite out, but I sure was dazed. Lying on my belly, weak as a baby, couldn't even lift my head. But I remember thinking, 'Now that ain't right.' Trouble is I can't remember now what it was."

Roon patiently tried suggestions. Something about the voice? movements? clothing? hair? Nothing worked.

"Maybe I should sleep on it," Aberhart said. He glared at the door. "Young Dr. Know-it-all out there keeps wanting to stick a needle in me. Maybe I'd better let him."

"Might be a good idea."

Roon started to leave, but stopped when the old man said, "Wait a minute! Roon? You're young Bill's dad. And Olaf is his best friend." Aberhart cursed in a sympathetic tone. "I guess this ain't much fun for you."

"No. But I'm going to catch that kid, no matter who he is."

IT WAS ONLY a short drive to the Warren home, but time enough for Roon to pray and to curse. Pray that it hadn't been Olaf. Or if it had been Olaf, that Bill was not even aware of what his friend had done. Time to curse the fates that had made him a cop.

There was no sign on his face of either the praying or the cursing when he stopped the car in front of the Warrens.

An ordinary yellow-brick home, much like his own, one of the thousands that had sprung up in Wakefield Village as part of the post-war swallowing by the city.

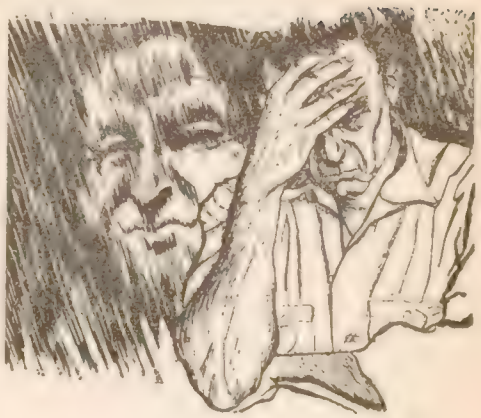
He didn't have to knock. The front door was opened for him as he mounted the steps. He saw a woman.

"You're the police officer? We've been waiting for you. Won't you come in."

He was very favorably impressed with the voice. Strong and calm. At least he wasn't going to have to talk to a gabby scatterbrain or a hand-wringing worrier.

He gave the living room the swiftest of glances. Nothing unusual. He saved his attention for the people, the boy in particular.

When he looked at the boy he was again very favorably impressed, and he felt a little guilty too. There were no silly and infuriating battles of the haircut in this home, or if there were the boy was the loser. A proper haircut, neat and short. And no silly teenage



clothes—a proper suit, shirt and tie. Even the shoes were proper black oxfords. Maybe the Warrens knew more about how to handle a teenager than the Roons.

He told himself angrily to think only like a cop. The boy was a witness, maybe a good one, maybe not. His job to find out.

Mrs. Warren made the introductions. Mr. Warren was a tweedy little pipe-smoker who mumbled, who seemed relieved to get words out of his mouth and his pipe back in, then to settle back unobtrusively in a corner chair.

Mrs. Warren was very obviously the stronger parent in this house. She was only a small woman, rather plain, but even the way she sat in her chair spoke of calm strength.

"Perhaps you should proceed," she said. "Harold, you will give the officer your full cooperation."

"Yes, Mother."

"Just tell me what you saw, Harold."

"Yes, sir." The boy had man-

ners. He spoke clearly; he looked straight at you. "I was walking home from the high school along Willoughby when I noticed this fellow run out into the middle of the intersection, stand there for a few seconds, then run down the other side of the Inn from where I was. I seemed to sense that he was scared, running from something, so that's why I looked at him. But I can't honestly say I saw him clearly. I wasn't that close, sir."

"What did you see?"

"I did see that he had long blond hair. And he was dressed like most kids."

Roon's next question seemed to stick a little in his throat. "Did you recognize the boy?"

"No, sir. And I want to stress that because there is one particular boy who might be suspected, as perhaps you know."

"I know." The unintentional harshness again. "Olaf Knudson."

"Yes, sir. Your son Bill's friend. But many times when Mother has taken me to places downtown, I've seen more than one boy with hair just as long and blond as Olaf's."

Roon nodded, once more favorably impressed. No glib or reckless answers from this boy. "You saw the boy disappear down the side of the Inn. Of course you know there's a back door there."

"He can't be expected to know that, Mr. Roon," Mrs. Warren interjected calmly. "He's never been in there."

Roon went all over it again with the boy. He didn't learn anything. He stood, thanked the Warrens for their cooperation.

Roon stopped the car a few blocks from the Warrens. So far, he had learned not one blessed thing more than Chief Cartman had told him. What should his next move be?

To think only like a cop, what would he do if Olaf Knudson was a kid he'd never heard of before.

First of all, he'd try to find out whether or not the boy had been with the gang of kids inside the Inn at the time of the holdup. And who was the logical one to question as to that? The suspect's buddy, a kid by the name of Bill Roon. And it couldn't wait till morning because this was armed robbery and assault with a deadly weapon.

Arriving home, he went straight to the bedroom. "Get up, Elsie." His grim tone brought her awake instantly. Deliberately using cop's language, he told her what he had to do.

She sat silently on the edge of the bed for a moment. He had been married to her for eighteen years, yet he realized now that he had no idea what she was thinking.

"Yes," she said finally, "you have to do it. I can see that. I'm just wondering what Bill's going to think of you."

"Quite possibly, he's going to hate my guts. But when he gets a little older and smarter, he'll real-

ize I was just doing my job. Now get him up."

Roon went into the kitchen and made himself a cup of instant coffee. Mother and boy entered, the boy rubbing sleep from his eyes, but a little pale too, so Roon knew that Elsie had told him what the business was about.

Trying to think only like a cop, which was impossible, Roon had the boy sit across from him at the little kitchen table. He wondered what swift emotion would show itself when he began the questioning. He guessed hostility, at least sullenness.

Another surprise. The boy grinned that infuriating grin teenagers reserve for the more absurd antics of the grownup world. "Dad, if you think Olaf would stick up Mr. Aberhart, and hit him with a gun besides, you're crazy!"

Roon lost his temper a little. He wondered if it was because he sensed that the Warren boy, whom he'd just been talking to, would never talk to his father like that. "Don't give me any of your lip."

And then the reaction he had first expected did appear. Hostility.

"Okay, Dad. But I guess I know Olaf. And he likes Mr. Aberhart. Mr. Aberhart is always kidding him, but in a nice way."

"Kidding him?" That might be important some way. "What about?"

"About his hair. His clothes." The boy colored slightly. "Girls."

Then the boy spoke emphatically again, but without hostility now. "Dad, Olaf thinks Mr. Aberhart is the greatest old guy around. He wouldn't stick him up. Or hit him. And where would he get the gun?"

Roon was calm again. "Maybe we can get this cleared up right now. All I need to be sure of is that Olaf was with the rest of you kids at the Inn at the time of the holdup."

"Well, sure he was with—" The boy suddenly looked sick.

Roon felt a little that way too. "Go on. Get it out."

"He goofed off early."

"By himself?"

The boy nodded stiffly. A pleading expression took form. "But that doesn't mean anything. Every time he gets an idea for a poem he just ups and goofs off. All by himself."

"A poem? You never told me he writes poetry."

A little hostility appeared again. "Should I have told you? You'd have sneered at that the way you sneer at everything we do."

Roon felt guilt; there was at least a little truth in the boy's charge. But was a father supposed to pretend to *like* the insane music, crazy clothes and absurd haircuts of the younger generation?

He tried his best to get back to thinking only like a cop. "Bill, maybe some of the other kids know where Olaf went. Maybe even one of them went with him. You make a list of the names and addresses of all the kids you can think of who

were at the Inn tonight. And before you accuse me of trying to turn you into a rat fink, kindly remember that if you're right about Olaf, one of your other friends may be able to prove it. Do it up in your room. I'll pick it up later."

After the boy, frowning, had left the kitchen, Elsie came in from the living room, where she'd been sitting in the darkness. "That wasn't so bad. And now you have to talk to Olaf, don't you? But it can't be Olaf. He hasn't a drop of viciousness in him."

"How do you know? Who can be sure of his own kid, let alone somebody else's?"

The phone in the living room rang.

"That'll be my lovable old chief," Roon growled.

But it wasn't Cartman. "Mr. Roon, this is John Knudson speaking. I heard the late news on the radio—about the holdup. I've been trying to get you since."

Roon said not a word; his mouth was suddenly very dry. Was this going to be one of those terrible occasions when a father turns in his own son?

"Okay if I ask if you've caught the boy?"

"I haven't," Roon said.

"From the description of the boy, and the location of the service station right across from the Inn, where Olaf was tonight, is Olaf a suspect?"

Roon hesitated, groped for reassuring words, finally said, "He's a suspect."

"Then I'll get him up right now so you can talk to him."

"Yes. Do that."

Roon said to Elsie afterward, "I don't know what to make of that. I guess the best way to find out is to get right over there."

DURING THE DRIVE, Tom Roon felt anger and suspicion and fear stirring in him. Olaf's silly long blond hair. Was Knudson, whom he'd never met, one of those contemptible weaklings of fathers? And wasn't the kid who was allowed to do whatever he pleased the very kid who most frequently got into trouble?

The appearance of the man who opened the door shocked Roon. If Knudson was a weakling, it certainly wasn't physically. He towered a full foot above the detective; his bare arms were as heavily muscled as any Roon had ever seen.

"I asked my wife to stay in bed," Knudson said as he ushered Roon into the living room. If the big man was the least worried, he was showing not the slightest sign of it. He spoke quietly, with great calm. "She gets excited easily."

Olaf was slouched on a sofa, wearing dressing gown over pajamas, apparently studying the toes of his yellow slippers. He didn't look up. Roon felt the skin on his face tighten at the sight of the long blond hair.

Roon said, "Now, Olaf. Go ahead."

The boy did not look up.

"Olaf." In Knudson's voice was a quiet note of firm authority that puzzled Roon; hardly the voice of a man who lacked the gumption to make his kid get a half-decent haircut. "You look at Mr. Roon when he's talking to you."

The boy did look up then, to glare at his father. There was a battle of eyes, which the boy lost, his gaze switching to Roon.

The boy answered all Roon's questions freely but sullenly. He knew nothing about the holdup. He didn't know what time he'd left the Inn, but earlier than the rest of the kids. He had walked down Willoughby all the way to the park, then came home from there.

Yes, he'd been all alone. No, he hadn't seen anybody he knew. He hadn't been looking because he had had something on his mind. No, he didn't remember seeing any other boy with long blond hair.

Knudson broke the silence that followed the last of Roon's questions. "Now, Olaf, take Mr. Roon up to your room."

The boy's lips trembled. He burst out at his father, "You mean to say you want him to search my room?"

"You do, Olaf. You're not supposed to have to prove your innocence in this world, but sometimes it's the best way."

The boy didn't move from the sofa for a long moment. Tom Roon wondered if Olaf was going to defy his father. But finally Olaf stood and strutted stiffly to the stairs. At the top of the stairs, he slammed a door open and bowed mockingly and waved the detective to enter.

Not entering, Roon said, "Olaf, of course you resent this—anybody would—but aren't you overdoing it a little?"

Roon thought of the instant retort as being a typically lofty one of an outraged teenager. "What I resent is your obvious incompetence. You and Fearless Fosdick would make a good pair."

Roon stayed absolutely calm. "Incompetent? How so, Olaf?"

"If you talked to Mr. Aberhart and asked him if I'd stick him up, let alone hit him with a gun, you'd find out how so."

The boy pounded down the stairs, leaving the detective wondering whether the outburst had been legitimate, or a very convincing act. Olaf was said to be an exceptionally intelligent boy.

He made a careful and thorough search. He got that dirty feeling he occasionally got on his job when he found a package of cigarettes at the back of a drawer. He shook his head sourly at a cupboard full of crazy teenage clothes. He grimaced as he touched a pair of pointed-toed suede shoes with his standard black oxford.

There was a dollar bill and some silver in the boy's wallet. No other

money in the room. No gun. And Roon the father was relieved, while Roon the cop thought, *Getting nowhere.*

He went back downstairs. Olaf, he saw, had decided to ignore him.

"Back to bed now, Olaf," Mr. Knudson said.

The boy had decided, apparently, that his father wasn't worth recognizing either. The way Olaf strutted haughtily out of the room without so much as a glance at either man might have been funny under some circumstances.

"When he got home tonight," Knudson said, "he went straight up to his room."

Roon wondered. Many a father had done worse things than lie to save a son. Yet he found himself believing the big man.

"Mr. Roon, I saw you glare at that silly hair of his when you came in. I made a mistake about that. When it was only half as long, I started to tease him—calling him Ingrid, for one thing. Got his back up. Of course, I could make him cut it, but—" Knudson shrugged massive shoulders.

Then he startled the detective by saying, "Did you ever read any of Olaf's poetry?"

"I didn't even know he wrote any till tonight."

Knudson chuckled. "I don't know if it's any good or not. I'm a construction foreman, not a professor." He was serious again. "What he writes about is important. He gets all worked up about cruel, violent things—wars, and so on."

"You mean to say his poetry shows he wouldn't commit an act of violence?"

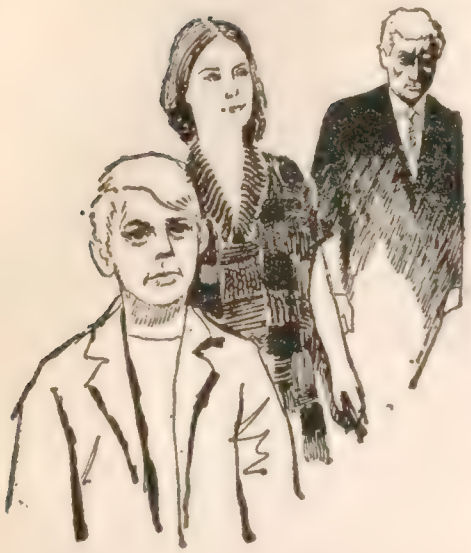
"Exactly, however fantastic or corny that sounds. Most of us have something we put our hearts into. With Olaf, it's his poetry. I know he's no angel—he wouldn't be a natural boy if he was. And he's a little crazy right now, but he'll grow out of that. But he wouldn't slug an old man. That I know. That's why I phoned you. You should start looking for another boy with long blond hair."

ON THE BASIS of the father's opinion, Tom Roon could hardly drop Olaf as a suspect, still it was time now to look for another boy with long blond hair. He phoned an old friend, Lieutenant Shannon, who protested profanely at being awakened at three o'clock in the morning but then said, "Okay, if it's that important, come right out. Side door."

Despite dressing gown and pajamas, Shannon had the usual cigar stuck in the tough face of his bullet-shaped head. He waved Roon to a chair in the rec room, handed him a cup of coffee. "What's it about?"

"Kids."

Shannon winced. He pointed his cigar at a guitar lying on the ping-pong table. "I'm in the doghouse with mine. She's been getting friendly with a great big blonde



muscular moose of a girl, the kind who looks like she shaves every morning. So I tried, very delicately, to *hint* to Lorrie that maybe the girl is a little—you know. What did it get me?"

Despite the cigar in his hand, Shannon tried to imitate a snippy teenage girl. " 'Daddy, you've got a very dirty mind.' If you don't talk to them about such things, you're a poor parent. If you do, you've got a very dirty mind." He sighed. "But you didn't come here to listen to my problems. What's yours?"

Roon held back nothing. He concluded, "But it's quite possibly not Olaf. There's many another teenager in Metro who'd fit what description we've got. The worst teenage troubles we've had in Wakefield Village have been started by kids from downtown. Like that knifing last year. I'm hoping you can think of a likely kid, or maybe more than one, from downtown."

"I thought of a likely kid as soon as you mentioned the long blond hair," Shannon said grimly. "But he doesn't live in a condemned shack around Pier Five. He lives in Wimbleton Hills, in one of those homes up there that make Buckingham Palace look a little shoddy."

Roon thought fleetingly that the bad teenagers these days were popping up in all income groups, all districts.

"He'd do something like that just for kicks," Shannon said. He scowled. "I've been up to see his parents. They sound sensible, till you start talking about their boy. They either can't or won't exercise the slightest control over that kid."

"You'll check him?"

Shannon nodded. "And a couple of other possibles I can think of."

Roon felt immensely relieved and grateful. He had a slight hunch that the boy Shannon had in mind might be the guilty boy.

Shannon brought him back down to earth. "But bad as it is for you personally, you'd better keep working on the local angle, just to be sure.

Roon sighed, "I'll do that."

It was a fifteen-minute drive back across the city to home. He could think of nothing he could do

before morning. Then he'd talk to other kids who had been at the Inn. Maybe one of them would be able to clear Olaf. Roon was annoyed at himself. *That* wasn't thinking only like a cop. Clear Olaf or indict him.

And he'd talk to Aberhart again; maybe the old man would remember the thing he'd seen, or heard, or sensed, or felt that "wasn't right."

When he got home, he found on the kitchen table the list of names and addresses he had ordered Bill to write. In large red letters at the bottom of the page was printed "Drawn up by Bill Roon the Stoolie." Written in rage, or supposed to be funny? Roon sighed. Kids.

He slid off his shoes and lay down on the sofa. Perhaps he dozed a little. At seven o'clock the phone rang.

"Well?" Cartman demanded.

When Roon had told what he had done so far, the chief said grudgingly, "At least you talked to that freak. What next?"

Roon told him.

"All right," Cartman said. "But I want that freak or some other kid by the time the newspapers come out tomorrow."

Elsie had been awakened by the phone. She got up and made him breakfast. He drank several cups of coffee, but he didn't eat much. By eight, he'd changed shirts and shaved. It was very early of a Sunday to be calling on private homes, but this was armed robbery and assault with a deadly weapon.

Again, that morning, he tried to think only like a cop. Nothing could have been more impossible. At every home he called at the parents showed their concern for their teenagers, but in vastly different ways. In one home he was fawned upon as if he were an all-powerful official in a police state.

At another home he got no farther than the front door. "You're not talking to that boy at all, unless you've got a warrant and he's got a lawyer."

In another home his visit caused foolish tears and wailing. "You see what hanging around with those bums has got you? Now the police are here."

It was two o'clock in the afternoon by the time he'd run out of names, names from Bill's list, names he'd picked up along the way. It was all wasted time. Several of the kids remembered seeing Olaf leave the Inn around twelve-fifteen or twenty. Not a one of them had seen him afterward.

He tried to contact Shannon. Couldn't. His strong hunch that Shannon's suspect was the guilty boy persisted, but he kept working doggedly on the local angle.

He phoned the hospital. The woman said that Mr. Aberhart had gone home. She sounded relieved.

He drove out to the service station. The old man, in overalls, his head bandaged, was standing in behind the grease pit.

Roon asked, "Have you remembered what it was that 'wasn't right'?"

Aberhart swore. "If I'd remembered, you'd have heard."

"So let's play holdup. I'll be the kid."

The old man showed where he'd been standing when he'd swung around and tried to hit the boy. "I realize now, though it ain't a big thing, that the kid was just average size, not a beanpole or a runt. Huh! Something else just came back to me. Maybe I just caught this out of the corner of my eye as I was falling, but he had on one of them jackets that are all the rage with teenagers. Can't remember no color. Too dark in here, I guess."

"The jacket—could that have probably been the thing that 'wasn't right'?"

Aberhart swore. "If he didn't have on one of them jackets, considering the hair, it wouldn't have been right. They go together. It was something else. If only I could remember—"

They re-enacted the rest of it. Fruitlessly. Tom Roon had learned that the boy was an average-sized kid in a faddish teenage jacket. So what?

The phone in the office rang, and Aberhart, after answering, called, "You want to talk to a Lieutenant Shannon?"

Roon raced to the phone. He had a strong hunch that his troubles were over.

Shannon said, "That kid I told you about has the best alibi yet. He was picked up with a bunch of smart alecks down at the Beach last night. We had to let him go, but he was down here from midnight till four in the morning. And those other two possibles I mentioned are just as clean." Shannon's voice turned ominously grim. "You'll have to keep working on the local angle."

Roon slowly cradled the phone, sick at heart. He had had such a strong hunch. And what was he supposed to do now?

He walked out and scowled at the intersection. Had he overlooked something? Maybe the key was that he'd completely forgotten how you think and feel when you're a teenager. Maybe he should think about that for a while.

He didn't think it was much of an idea, but it was the only one he had. He drove out to the new high school, and stopped in the big deserted parking lot.

And right away shook his head hard. On a weekday this lot was crammed with good cars. In his day downtown it had been bikes. In his day a quarter had been a lot of money. These kids had plenty of money to indulge themselves in

their fads—their clothes, their records, their haircuts. Conditions were so different for these kids. Could any adult really understand them?

A grey Chev pulled into the lot. He automatically thought like a cop about it. What was a car doing in a high-school parking lot on Sunday?

To his surprise, the car parked close to him. He watched a slim middle-aged woman in a well-cut suit get out and walk toward him. He liked the face at once. It had an easy good-humor about it.

"You're Mr. Roon, aren't you? I'm Miss O'Day, one of Bill's teachers."

He got quickly out of the car. He was a little embarrassed. "I used to know all his teachers when he was in public school. But when they get to be teenagers, they won't hear of you going to the school and talking to teachers."

She smiled. "You bring terrible disgrace down upon them if you do." The smile left. "May I ask how you're making out with the investigation of the holdup?"

He didn't ordinarily confide in strangers, but he found it natural with this one.

When he had finished, she said, "Coming here to try to remember how teenagers think and feel—I don't think that's such a silly idea. Why not come inside?"

He followed her in, down a long spotless modern hall. She went through a doorway. He followed. But then he stopped up short and shook his head in amazement. He was standing at the rear of a little theatre. He was struck with how expensive and professional everything looked, the expensively-padded seats sloping down to the stage, the elaborate lighting system there, the broadloom under his feet. He had known that the new school had a big gym, a swimming pool, an auditorium. He had never even dreamed of this.

She read his face. "Yes, we give them the best of everything."

She led the way backstage. She opened a large trunk. He saw elaborate velvet costumes, fancy ladies' fans, a selection of wigs in all the standard colors—some sort of an historical play, he guessed.

"We even rent them the best of costumes," she said. She smiled at him, pointed at a second large trunk. "But you'd be more interested in this. The senior group is doing a mystery play this term."

There was an interruption. A teenage girl, pale and big-eyed with worry, came in. "Miss O'Day, you've got to save me! I borrowed my mother's best silk scarf for the tea dance yesterday afternoon, and I just discovered this morning that I've lost it, and she doesn't know I borrowed it, and if she finds out I lost it, she'll kill me! Would you open the lost and found for me? Please!"

Miss O'Day nodded, said in an aside to Roon, "Crime prevention is very important. Particularly when it's murder."

Roon, for the first time that day a little amused, tagged along. But the smile vanished from his face the instant Miss O'Day swung open the doors of the big cupboard. The cupboard was simply crammed—gloves and scarfs and overshoes and sweaters; several boys' jackets, a couple of raincoats, several umbrellas—and all good stuff. Today's teenager had too much of everything and was shockingly careless.

With a squeal of delight, the girl snatched up a scarf, thanked Miss O'Day effusively, ran off.

Miss O'Day nodded at the cupboard. "And this is only three months' collection."

They returned backstage. She touched some papers strewn on the table. "Harold Warren's work. We're going to try a revue." She sighed faintly. "It'll probably be pretty awful. I sometimes wonder whose desire it really is that he should be a writer—his or his mother's. He hasn't a quarter of the natural talent of Olaf Knudson."

The mention of Olaf was a sharp reminder to Roon that this was not a social visit. "The holdup —would Olaf do it?"

She sat down slowly at the table. It was a moment before she said, "It's hard for me to think objectively about him. He infuriates me: he has such a smug and superior attitude toward everything we try to do. This revue for example. He says its purpose is to amuse a bunch of old fuddy-duddies." She smiled. "Guess who he means."

"I hope my boy doesn't give you too much trouble." That slipped out.

"No. He's just bored because his talents lie in maths and sciences. But Olaf? He's my most annoying rebel. His contributions are always destructive, though frequently they're brilliant. He's a very bright boy."

Some of her words stuck in Roon's mind. Rebel. Destructive. Very bright. There had been more than one case of a boy like that committing a crime just to show his contempt for and superiority to the adult world.

"We're all supposed to remember that rebelliousness is natural at his age," Miss O'Day went on, "and that wild colts make the best horses. But it's hard to do when you're teaching. Yet Olaf? No, Mr. Roon, I don't think his rebelliousness would take that form."

He tried to think of anything he might ask. He could think of only one thing. "The Warren boy says he came from here Saturday night. Did he?"

"Oh yes. I left at midnight. Harold stayed for a while to put things away and lock up."

As he left the school, he was racking his brains again. What else could he do? He suddenly thought of one thing he'd overlooked and wondered if the overlooking had been an act of cowardice—it required no courage to check up on other people's kids.

He phoned home. "Bill there? Good. If he comes home in the next few minutes, send him out. Any excuse."

He hung up before Elsie could ask questions. Nor did she ask any when he got home and went straight to Bill's room. She stood in the doorway watching, her face expressionless but pale as he began his search.

He growled, "If it was Olaf, he could have met Bill afterwards and given him the money and the gun."

In the very back of the bottom drawer of the bureau he found a small diary. He hadn't had the slightest inkling that the boy kept a diary. He picked it up and leafed from the back. He read the last few entries. They were adolescently innocent and silly, about a girl named Roseanne. He put the diary back exactly where it had been.

His thorough search ended with the cupboard, with a shake of his head at the teenage jackets and pants, at Bill's other pair of pointed-toed suede shoes.

He grinned wanly at Elsie. "Nothing."

"Of course." She was very pale now. "And he need never know about this."

He nodded. He didn't say what he was thinking, that he should have searched the room earlier. It was easy to tell yourself to think only like a cop; it was impossible to do it.

RUNNING AROUND like a chicken with its head cut off, he thought more than once that Sunday afternoon. He went out to the service station again.

"Have you remembered that thing that wasn't right?"

Aberhart swore at him. "I'm trying! I'm trying!"

He talked to Shannon again. Perhaps the lieutenant had thoughts of another possible suspect? No. He drove down to Metro police headquarters and talked to several men he knew. Perhaps they had heard a whisper? Perhaps they knew of a likely suspect? No. No. He spent a fruitless hour looking at mug shots of juvenile offenders.

Dusk was falling when he came to a hard and bitter decision. If he came up with nothing new before morning, he'd talk to Olaf—and yes, Bill too, again. Not talk, grill. Thoroughly. But first he'd try one last thing.

He phoned Aberhart and McGowan. They readily agreed to cooperate. He phoned Harold Warren and asked him.

"Just a minute, sir," the boy

said. Then Roon heard, "Mother."

She came on the line.

"Of course we'll help," she said in that strong, calm voice he admired.

He went home and lay on the sofa for a while, and tried to doze, and didn't.

Bill came in, and Roon, tired and discouraged and fearful though he was, kept working at his job.

"Bill, this Harold Warren. Is he a level-headed kid? Do you think his observations would be accurate?"

"I guess so."

"What do you mean you guess? You're in the same class, aren't you?"

"Yes, but we never see him except in school. He's not stupid, if that's what you mean, Dad. He gets good marks." The boy smiled to himself. "The teachers are scared not to give him good marks. If they don't they hear from Mother."

Roon said plainly what he thought of that remark. "That's a cheap crack, son. You sound jealous. Your marks could be better."

It was one of those times in their frequent little clashes when the boy had an immediate answer, calmly delivered.

"No, Dad, I'm not one little bit jealous."

Roon dropped it deliberately. It was no time now for that thankless and infuriating pursuit, trying again to understand the teenage mind.

At ten o'clock he arrived at the service station. It was dark now, just as it had been at the time of the holdup. Aberhart, red haired McGowan, Harold and Mrs. Warren were waiting for him.

"If we run through the whole thing," he said, "maybe I'll learn something."

With Roon in the role of the boy, he and Aberhart went through all the motions of the holdup slowly and painstakingly. Nothing.

Roon went across to the sidewalk in front of the Inn, where McGown and the Warrens were waiting. McGowan had turned on lights and opened doors, just as they had been the night before.

"Harold, show me exactly where you were standing when you saw the boy."

"Yes, sir." The Warren boy led the way to the narrow opening between the left side of the Inn and the bakery next door.

From this spot, Roon looked at the intersection. Yes, from here, if a boy ran out into the middle of the intersection, you would not be able to make out his features; you would be able to make out long blond hair.

McGowan spoke up, "I can vouch for Harold being here. I guess I heard the siren before the kids. Anyway, I was the first out

of the Inn. I saw Harold right here—right away."

Roon nodded. "That would be only a very few minutes after the holdup. Mr. Aberhart crawled all the way, but he got to the phone pretty quick.

"After you saw the blond boy, you didn't know what to make of it for a couple of minutes, is that it, Harold?"

"Exactly, sir. He acted like an animal on the run, but I wasn't sure anything was really wrong, and I didn't want to make trouble. So I just stood here for a few minutes."

Roon nodded. "And you saw him disappear down the other side of the Inn." Roon led the way there.

"And he could have gone in this door here, or he could have kept right on going across those vacant lots to the next street."

Roon wanted to groan. Nothing. Just nothing. He thanked McGowan and Harold Warren for their help.

"Glad to," said McGowan.

"You're quite welcome," Mrs. Warren said.

After McGowan and the Warrens had left, Roon prowled the area. He went to the spot where the Warren boy had stood, squeezed his way down the narrow strip between the left side of the Inn and the bakery. The strip dead-ended in a high platform. And there in the pitch darkness Roon shook his head with something close to despair.

A boy on the run from holding up the service station might well have plunged down this side of the Inn—*if he didn't know the area.* The actual boy had taken the safe route down the *other* side of the Inn. And what boy with long blond hair knew the area intimately? And who was that boy's inseparable buddy and possible accomplice?

He went back to the service station. Mr. Aberhart was now in a subdued mood. "I'm sure sorry I can't remember what that thing was that weren't right."

"That can't be helped."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Right now I suppose I should go home and sleep. But I don't think I could, though I'm tired enough."

"If you want to, we can play some cards. Cribbage."

"Why not."

They played cards for a long time, there in the little office of the service station, but Tom Roon's heart was not in the game. He couldn't turn off his cop's mind.

Just after four, he abruptly stopped dealing. "There's one thing I didn't try. Maybe it's silly—but let's run through the holdup again. With you as the boy, and I'll be you."

Again they went through the motions slowly, painstakingly.

Aberhart spread some newspapers in behind the grease pit. "So you won't get your suit dirty."

Roon got belly down. "You lay right here. You were dazed and you couldn't lift your head. The boy stood over you for a second. Then he turned and walked into the office. Do it, Mr. Aberhart."

As the old man walked toward the office, Roon said hopelessly, "In this position, with just that crack of light coming out from under the office door, all I can see clearly is your shoes."

A burst of excited profanity rattled out of the old man. "That's it!"

Roon leaped up.

The old man's words tumbled out. "You gotta understand how it is with me and the young fellows, Mr. Roon. See, I kid 'em all the time. About their hair. About their clothes. About the crazy singers these days. And one of the things I kid 'em about is them pointed shoes. Like I say, 'How come you're wearing pointed shoes? You got pointed feet?' And that's what I saw, Mr. Roon.

"The kid didn't have on them silly pointed shoes. He was wearing ordinary black oxfords just like yours. And no teenager with long blond hair and one of them crazy teenage jackets would be seen dead in pair of shoes like yours."

The old man's animation suddenly vanished. " 'Course, it's only a little thing. Maybe it don't mean nothing."

Roon strode grimly outside. For two minutes he stared at the Inn and the area around it. Then he stood quite still for another two minutes, his eyes half closed. He remembered boys' cupboards, a boy's shoes, rooms in behind a stage, faces—and what he should have seen on those faces.

It was then as if he were two separate people for an instant, one of them very happy, one of them very grim and coldly angry.

His voice was quite calm. "All along in this thing I've been telling myself to think only like a cop. What I've really been doing, deep down anyway, is thinking like just another worried parent. Otherwise, I would have guessed the truth sooner."

He strode the rest of the way across the street, and, flashlight in hand, went down the left side of the Inn. He was a little surprised to find what he was looking for.

TOM ROON parked in front of the new high school at quarter after eight that morning.

At quarter to nine Olaf and Bill came down the sidewalk together, so deep in some discussion that they didn't notice him till they were level with the police car. He motioned them to keep walking.

Harold Warren appeared. All alone. He came to the car window. "Good morning, sir."

"Get in." Roon said nothing more till they got out in front of the narrow opening between the Inn and the bakery. "You first."

The boy's pace got slower and slower as he went down the strip ahead of Roon. At the dead-end, the high platform, the boy turned about. Roon noted the sudden utter bloodlessness of the boy's lips. Yet the voice, strangely, was controlled.

The boy said, "You know, don't you?"

"Not everything." Roon glanced into the shadows underneath the platform. "Why didn't you come back on Sunday and get your gym bag?"

"I had no time. Mother had my whole day scheduled."

"You want to tell me about this?"

"Yes I do." The boy sounded anguished but eager. "It was just a spur of the moment thing. After Miss O'Day left the school on Saturday night, I was fooling around with the costumes and I put on the blond wig, and it suddenly struck me that I could fix it up to look just like Olaf's hair."

"And you got gloves and a typical teenage jacket from the lost and found."

"Yes. Miss O'Day had left me all the keys."

"And the gun. From the props the senior class is going to use for their mystery play."

"Yes."

"And your mistake. You ran into here thinking it was a way through to the next street."

"Yes. And I panicked and wasted a few minutes. By the time I got the wig and jacket off and into my gym bag with the money and gun, and back out onto the street, Mr. McGowan was looking straight at me. So I had to stay and say the first thing I could think of."

"Had to?" Roon's voice was hard. "Trying to frame another kid is a pretty rotten trick, isn't it? Do you hate Olaf that much?"

"I don't hate him. My first idea, at the school, was I'd play a little joke on him. But when I went into the service station, I wasn't thinking about Olaf at all."

"You were thinking of the money?"

"No."

"Are you and Olaf both interested in the same girl? Were you trying to cut him out by getting him into trouble?"

"There's no girl."

"Then why did you do it?"

But all he got for an answer was a shrug of the thin shoulders.

In the police car, Roon felt only pity. "You're old enough to know what I have to do."

"I know."

Roon put the car in motion. "This is going to be a terrible shock to your parents."

And then right there smack in the middle of the intersection, busy now with Monday morning traffic,

Tom Roon, expert and experienced driver who never stalled a car—stalled the police car.

He heard himself speak in a horrified whisper. "What did you say?"

Harold Warren repeated both the words and the chuckle. "I can hardly wait to see Mother's face."

When Tom Roon got home that afternoon, Olaf and Bill were sitting on the front steps. Roon started to laugh quietly; Olaf had had his hair cut. At least half-sensible, Roon thought of it.

"Congratulations on rejoining the human race."

"I only let it go like that because of my father," Olaf said sheepishly. Then came an expression Roon thought was supremely teenagerish; Olaf looked as solemnly pious as a young saint. "Mr. Roon, my father is not a reasonable man."

"Very few of us fathers are, Olaf." Then Roon was serious. "Harold Warren, he's more to be pitied than hated."

Olaf nodded. Bill said to Olaf, "Some kids sure have awful parents."

Roon took that remark inside to Elsie. "That's probably as close to a compliment as we'll ever get."

He went into the bedroom, started to undress, ready to sleep for a long time. "I hope the next time Cartman calls me in the middle of the night, it's a grisly ax murder, an armed rebellion, or even an invasion from space by little green men. As long as it doesn't involve kids."

A New Unparalled Reading Adventure!

THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

Featuring APRIL DANCER and MARK SLATE

Now—a brilliant new addition to a sensational series—THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE! Yes, The Man from U.N.C.L.E. dominated all TV ratings, even as its companion magazine changed the reading habits of all spy-action fans world-wide! You will thrill to the dynamic suspense-packed novels written especially for this great new magazine and bombshelled directed to your reading pleasure. The Girl from U.N.C.L.E. is the spy-fiction treat of 1967. Reserve your copy now at your newsdealer's. Don't delay.

ALL IS FORGIVEN

by WALTER SNOW

What could it mean, that mad, senseless flight from everything a man could desire? Only I—and a ravishing, man-killing woman—knew the real answer.

TRANS-CONTINENTAL won't touch divorce work and generally passes up runaway husband jobs. But when the wife is somebody like Audrey Johnson, the district chief will make an exception.

"She's a high school teacher who's also a grade A beauty," the chief told me when I returned from wrapping up a routine skip-trace. "If there had been any other cop in the office, I wouldn't assign her to a wolf like you."

"Want me to tend the store while you go out baying?"

"Harvard University may have a million dollar case for me," the chief replied. It was his standard joke, our district office being in Boston, Mass.

He shoved me a slip containing a suburban address. "You're to see her tomorrow, after school. What puzzles me is why any husband would want to run away from the likes of her. I'll wager that none of her boy pupils are dropouts."

"Maybe that's the trouble. Juvenile competition."

"Not with Audrey. She's got class. And she's the type who goes for a real man." The chief added that Audrey, Mrs. Johnson, wasn't the heir to the U. S. Mint but had requested that one top operative be assigned to handle the case personally for the first ten days. She specifically didn't want it to be transferred from one district office to another and be given maybe routine treatment.

"The stupid missing husband," said the chief, "is only a garage owner but she wants him badly enough to fly you to any point in the U. S. A., pay all incidental ex-

penses and a neat profit to the agency."

The address proved to be an enlarged Cape Cod of the type that sells for $17,500 in most bedroom towns but is priced at $22,500 in the north-of-Boston suburbs. One grand of that extra went for two hydrangea bushes still abloom with snowballs on this chilly October day and hence probably the best investment of all.

As the door opened, my eyes did a double-take. For a split-second I thought I was being greeted by an older sister of Audrey.

"Hello, there," the woman said in a sultry voice. "Won't you come in? I'm sure I'll be interested in whatever you're selling."

She was the mother, a Mrs. Cleveland, a woman of fifty with a two-toned hair job in which one silver gray lock ran through the center of peroxide blonde glory.

It was the sole concession to her age. A tight salt-and-pepper dress harmonized with the hair style. It also stressed her triumph in keeping the hips of her twenties or thirties. What made me blink a third time was the low square neckline, far from the New England Puritan fashion.

I mentioned my appointment.

"Audrey's been detained by an unexpected faculty conference at Cabot Junior High," said Mrs. Cleveland. "The principal is just now revealing the intimate details of the newest teenage sex club. I presume you have the same aversion for tea that our early Boston patriots had."

Mrs. Cleveland fetched a requested bourbon and water. Apparently her town had been hard hit by the drought and she had developed some method of making ice cubes from alcohol. She hunched forward in a reclining chair and so deepened the cleft in the neckline. At the same time she hiked that salt-and-pepper skirt above the knees.

Being a diplomat and also in my early forties, I didn't begrudge ocular tribute to either of the double features.

Sipping the liquid dynamite, I wondered how long the mother-in-law had been without a man; not until that night did I learn Mrs. Cleveland had been living with her daughter and son-in-law from her fifty-first birthday until now, the eve of her fifty-sixth. Five years.

Granting that women greatly outnumber men in her age group, one would have thought she could have snagged a mate in half that time. Was she the type who insisted on too big a portfolio of blue chips?

Mrs. Cleveland hypnotized my eyes by crossing her legs. The bared lower thighs certainly were not marred by varicose veins. I wondered if she had gotten word that Audrey would be detained for another hour. Or did she put on this act with everything in pants just to keep in practice?

The sound of a car turning into the driveway made me relax.

Audrey entered with a gliding movement. She was more the tawny lioness than her mother but nowhere near as blatant. As a math teacher at Cabot Junior High, she couldn't go in for a Moll Flanders bosom act and, in any case, lacked the upper development of her mother.

But she was a honey blonde in her early thirties, shimmering in a golden gown that did justice to a figure attained with the blessings of nature and dietary disciplines.

Where Mrs. Cleveland gave the impression of being about to overpower a man, Audrey was the distant star-spangled girl on the flying trapeze until she pursed her lips.

She greeted me with a moist-mouthed ghost of a smile. Like my district chief, I wondered why Oliver Johnson had ever run away from the likes of her. The male faculty members and the principal, I felt, must have tried to prolong that discussion on the waywardness of teenagers just to ogle this math teacher. Right then and there I decided to wangle a date with her before I started looking seriously for a missing mate.

Audrey, it developed, had disappointed her mother by marrying beneath her. She had left semi-swank Simons College to elope with a mere high school dropout ten years older than herself. Oliver was then a gas pump jockey at a small filling station and repair garage owned by an oil company, the local bank and his father in that proportion. Oliver, then in his early thirties, was a handsome six-footer and Audrey at that time was not yet the beauty she became later.

In college she had been a compulsive eater. Not until after marriage did she win the battle with calories.

It was Mrs. Cleveland who mentioned dropout. Audrey hastily added, "Oliver was weak only in math and it's my specialty."

"You should have gone back and finished college," interposed Mom. "You became just a junior high teacher, and by the substitute route at that, when you could have had senior high status."

"Would you believe," mused Audrey, ignoring her mother, "that Oliver's older brother is still pumping gas for his father and living with three kids in a flat above a butcher shop? Outside of his dad, Oliver is the only one in his family with the go-go to impress bankers."

"The bank was generous," said Mrs. Cleveland, "because you were handling the books. Look at her, Mr. Detective. The height of her ambition is a garage owner. She's more eager to have that damned two-bay filling station free and clear than to winter in Palm Beach."

"Ah, Mother, in your whole life just how many times have you been in Palm Beach? Wasn't it once for three weeks and the second time for two? Five weeks in fifty-odd years! You wanted me to marry someone like poor Daddy, who talked big about shrewd promotions, investments in future gilt-edges and guaranteed growth stocks. Did you know," she added, turning to me, "that when Daddy died he still had some shares in Stutz Bearcat (he always scorned General Motors)?

"Most of his money was in dry holes on the border of Canadian oil fields and the worst desert cats of uranium claims. Poor Daddy was a bluff and a bankrupt; that's why we're saddled with Mama."

"Must you take pleasure in being cruel?" said Mrs: Cleveland with a sniffling hint of a sob.

"Why don't you admit Oliver's good points? He put both the garage and this Cape Cod in my name; I own more of them now than the bank does."

Until that moment, my heart had been warming towards Audrey. Now I could picture Oliver musing, on the eve of his take-off, that he wouldn't have to provide for a soon-to-be-deserted wife. The computer-minded daughter of a calculating mother had grabbed everything from the beginning. The feeling that the chief breadwinner was not to be trusted with any of the income certainly contributed to a nice happy marriage.

Audrey gave me a recent photo of the missing husband. I asked to see the family album. Turning the pages, it was a shock to discover how the once handsome bridegroom of ten years ago, the virile six-footer, had become a stoop-shouldered potbelly with bags under his eyes.

I wondered why Audrey wanted her prematurely aged husband back. He looked more like a mate for her mother than herself. I asked about the guy's hobbies, if any.

"You can never drag him to a symphony concert or an art gallery," interposed Mrs. Cleveland. "He's a moody loner, a hunter and a trout-fishing nut."

An inquiry about reading habits led to stacks of magazines in the back two-car garage. Not only were there odd copies of a half dozen different outdoor sports magazines but there was a ten-year file of a particular hunting and fishing periodical.

Since this was October, I looked twice at the top cover of a huge rainbow leaping for a red and brown fly. The magazine was dated March. The addressograph tab bore the notation that the subscription still had two and a half years to run.

"Have you been throwing away any recent copies?" I asked.

"That was the last to come. I saved it in case Oliver got tired of

his wanderlust and decided to return."

"This is Oliver's slip-up," I explained. "The delivery halt means he is having his favorite magazine forwarded to a new address. It will be a simple matter to track him down through the circulation department."

Mrs. Cleveland did not follow us out to the garage. I remarked that she was liable to pop in on us the very next minute and then asked Audrey if we could have dinner together that night. I based my plea on the hope of digging up additional key facts but actually I had a strong yen for my client.

"I'll have to think up an excuse for ditching mother," said Audrey. "Oh, yes, I must see the chief of police about one of our delinquent sophomores. This town has one sea food place—Salt o' the Sea. I'll meet you there at seven. Do you like lobster? I've got a passion for lobster."

You will note that Audrey Johnson gave me no alternative choice for our date. I didn't get to first base that night. The session was a revealing one and a bit chilling. I saw the lioness' claws.

OLIVER'S forwarding address was c/o General Delivery, Middletown, Ohio. That meant he was playing it cagy and had probably changed his name.

Tracking down missing persons has its headaches but, when the subject is an adult male who must work for a living, one seldom runs into a blind alley. All men are creatures of habit: they generally get jobs in their old trades or professions; they buy and must register (even if under assumed names) the same types of cars they liked before; their taste buds are accustomed to their old familiar meals; they read their favorite magazines and often get tied up with women who are nearly doubles of the ones they deserted.

This last point made me uneasy during the flight from Boston to Cleveland and while driving-it-myself south to Middletown, Ohio (pop. 15,099)—almost identical to the Boston suburban town from which Oliver Johnson had bolted. It is one thing to return a runaway father to five little deserted children, who are undernourished and need new shoes. It is something else to try to persuade a childless husband, a man in his dangerous forties, that last fling decade, to go back to a purring pussy with atavistic throwbacks to the jungle.

Entering Middletown, I drove to the first filling station and ordered only a dollar's worth of gas: I might need fuel alibis for five or six stops in addition to an extra quart of oil and an air pressure check. I followed the jockey into a tiny office to collect the trading stamps and remarked that on my last trip through town some garage owner had given me ten dollars'

change for a five dollar bill. I hadn't realized the mistake until I pulled into a motel a hundred miles away.

"He was a pot-bellied guy in his early forties," I said. "Had a bald spot."

"We've got twenty-one stations in town," the kid said. "There are eleven on this end of Main Street and ten on the East End. There's a pot-belly at every second station. I don't know how many are bald. Mechanics wear caps to keep the grease outa their hair."

Oliver Johnson was at the thirteenth station, the second visited on the East End. He was working the hydraulic hoist for a grease job and took off a smudged cap to scratch his head. He had grown an Anthony Eden moustache since leaving the Boston area but there was no mistaking the rest of him. I asked the kid checking the air pressure in my tires who the mechanic was and he said it was the boss, Grover Jackson.

Once again a disappearance case figure had adopted a new name similar to his old one. It was odd but possibly significant that Mrs. Cleveland's son-in-law had taken the first name of Grover. Of course it was akin to Oliver.

I had journeyed across half of the nation to submit an offer to a runaway husband. This was not a deserting father, remember. He could very well tell Audrey, through me, where to go. I had no idea I would soon have a weapon to force his return.

It was almost six o'clock, near dinner time.

"Mr. Jackson," I began, "I'd like to see you when you're through work. I have a proposition from Massachusetts, Mr. Oliver Johnson."

My quarry's face sagged, his shoulders slouched and his voice was edged with despair. "She's got all my money. Every cent I had in the world on the day I left except a hundred bucks' traveling dough. I couldn't find a gas jockey's job for two weeks, didn't have enough to eat. What more does Audrey and her mother want—my blood?"

The offer from Massachusetts, I said, was that all would be forgiven if Oliver returned. Furthermore, the two pieces of property, the filling station and the Cape Cod, now solely in Audrey's name, would be put in the joint names of husband and wife.

"Did you by chance meet my modest mother-in-law? She's akin to that mademoiselle celebrated in the World War I ballad, the one from Armentieres, who hadn't made it in forty years."

"Audrey, Mrs. Johnson, is willing to finance a winter's stay for Mrs. Cleveland in her favorite Palm Beach. Perhaps your mother-in-law, to use Audrey's phrase, will be able to meet a golden-ager who's really golden."

"The chances are," said John-

son-Jackson, "that she'll never find anybody nit-witted or rich enough."

"You and Audrey will have a whole winter for a second honeymoon."

Johnson-Jackson broke into a hoarse laugh. He cleared his throat, finally, and asked how I had tracked him down. I told him.

"I've been away for six months," he said slowly. "Why didn't she hire a detective in the beginning?"

"She hoped you'd get homesick and return of your own volition," I said.

"One gets over homesickness in a few weeks. A healthy man grabs himself another woman. Why didn't she hire you just two months ago? The hell of it is that I've been re-married for five weeks."

"We didn't know you were divorced," I said in almost a whisper.

"A quick Reno job."

I tried a bluff. "I'm afraid, Mr. Johnson-Jackson, it wasn't Reno. If so, why the name change?"

A look of panic crossed the sagging, grease-smeared face. I hammered home the point that Reno records could be checked. My quarry realized that he had unconsciously betrayed himself and that I could supply two vengeful women with a fearful weapon—a threat of a bigamy arrest.

Too late now, Johnson-Jackson tried to plead absolute ignorance of Greater Boston, claimed he had never said anything about an Audrey-Bawdry or a mother-in-law and that I was a crooked bastard trying to frame him.

"We can bring witnesses," I said. "Audrey and Mrs. Cleveland can fly here tomorrow."

"I—I came here in a fog," the trapped man stammered. "I had a blackout. That's it. I had amnesia."

He grabbed the alibi like a lifebelt. As long as he could stick to an amnesia-story he could avoid arrest for bigamy. He had protected himself on all other counts. Unlike some disappearing husbands, he hadn't absconded with any funds, or faked his own death to provide a supposed widow with illegal insurance. He was especially fortunate on the latter score; next to T-Men, insurance sleuths are the most relentless.

Johnson-Jackson straightened up, squared his shoulders as if drawing strength from a growing realization that he had an out.

Standing there in the one lighted bay of the darkening garage, I didn't feel too happy about my job. I was paid to work for the abandoned wife and I could give her an opportunity for revenge: if she couldn't get her wayward man back she could at least break up the second marriage and glory in the knowledge that he couldn't have any woman during his jail term.

For a moment I wondered if I

could really carry out my job to the end. On the other hand, could I let this grease monkey think he could trick me with a threadbare alibi?

Look here, I told him, there are no true amnesia victims in 999 out of 1,000 cases. It's the sorriest of excuses for a disappearance act.

"It was amnesia," Johnson tried to insist. "I was going through a dark alley in Cleveland chasing a girl; I never dreamed she was pulling a phoney come-on gag with an accomplice until a mugger creased my scalp. He almost fractured my skull. The doctor who treated me will be a witness."

"This is something the papers will eat up," I jeered. "Can't you see the headlines? You'll be a three-week sensation in the tabloids. The more sedate journals will use columns but, naturally, on the inside pages. Audrey and I will get witness after witness who'll identify you. Your second wife will be forced to get an annulment."

"You are a blank-blank bastard, aren't you?"

At the end of his rope, Johnson-Jackson held up grease-black hands. The washroom, I realized, would be a think-chamber. I was fingering my Colt when he returned. He was clean-shaven but all of the grease hadn't been boraxoed from beneath finger-nails. He offered to take me to dinner.

My hand slipped into the side pocket again to finger the Colt. Did a desperate attempt to turn tables mean a detour onto a deserted road and a frantic grab for a tire iron?

Johnson-Jackson drove slowly along Main Street, waving or calling "Hi" left and right, like a settled businessman who feels at home and proud of his town.

He pointed out the banker who advanced generous credit. The reason: the newcomer had made weekly savings deposits for three months and so seemed a good risk on record as well as appearance. My driver expressed pride at being able to finance the purchase of his new two-bay station.

He turned into a side street shaded by gnarled maple trees. The old houses with porches gave way to the newer ones that saved on lumber bills—the ranches, the Cape Cods and the split-level—as one drove further away from the business district. I breathed easier. My host was planning a more subtle persuasion. He stopped before a comfortable, lower middle-class Cape Cod that was almost a duplicate of the 2,5 "salt-box" back in Massachusetts.

Audrey, during our final seafood dinner, had expressed fears that the vagrant Oliver might have decamped with some French-Canadian hussy. They had become more numerous than Yankees in many New England towns during the last few decades. I expressed doubts to Audrey, explaining that

a hometown girl might have an affair with a married man but would not take off with one unless she got a clear title to him first.

"He has a thing about French girls, though," Audrey had insisted.

The new wife not only was French but boasted the musical name of Desiree. Ironically, like the abandoned wife, she was also a teacher—of French in the Middletown High School, one status step above junior high.

There was a certain Mediterranean languor and softness to Desiree. She was the same height as Audrey, with almost identical honey blonde hair, within a year of his first wife's age and the product of the same dieting disciplines and a similar school of beauticians.

This rebellious male had deserted his New England wife and fled halfway across the nation but could not escape his subconscious desires for a particular type of woman who had become a habit.

Had he not encountered Desiree in Ohio, Johnson would have journeyed on to Indiana, Illinois and so on to California until he located her double.

"I think I met your mother once, three years ago," I said, after voicing a few compliments.

Desiree Jackson paused as she was about to set down two shrimp cocktails.

"You must have been mistaken. The tragedy was five years ago. Poor mother and father were both killed in a turnpike pileup during a visit to Quebec."

"Desiree," spoke up the husband, "was born in Nova Scotia. Not far from my native Maine, eh?"

The Maine reference was a fable and a plea to avoid mention of Massachusetts.

For the entree, Desiree brought

on a platter of giant lobsters. They were some of the largest I have ever seen and must have cost a pretty penny to be flown from Maine to Ohio. I accepted my lobster with a sinking feeling; if given a choice, as when dining at the Salt o' the Sea, I would have picked swordfish. As far as sea food is concerned, I only go for the steak fishes and shrimps. My decision back in Massachusetts to order swordfish, mild, easily cut flaky sea food, had prevented me, I realized now, from making time, if it were ever possible, with Audrey.

Now I tried to mutter an "ah" and a "How wonderful."

"I was brought up on lobsters in Nova Scotia," said Desiree. "Grov-

er, the old Down Easter, and I both have passions for them."

She held up a morsel of the red-tinted white flesh at the end of a tiny fork and her eyes sparkled. She poised it just above her mouth as if to sniff ambrosia and her tongue slipped out a bit in eagerness for the delicacy. She alternated with a tiny scoop of the browned stuffing but soon she was taking bigger portions greedily.

It was Desiree who held my attention, as Audrey had done. With passion increasing, she swooped into the splintered shell of the claw and ripped the clinging flesh away like a bird of prey. Emily Post was forgotten as Desiree clawed greedily to pry out each last morsel.

Back in Massachusetts I had been horrified at the manner in which Audrey Johnson had devoured a lobster; if she had carried over her eating passion to love it was easy to understand why Oliver had aged so drastically.

She finally excused herself and left the room.

Oliver gasped: "You—you won't notify the police before tomorrow morning, will you? You understand why I must have one more night . . ."

"What was the real reason you left Massachusetts? Were Audrey and her mother both devouring females?"

"Hell, no! But I can't talk now. Gotta go upstairs."

Oliver's face was flushed. He was a feverish cornered fugitive, ready for violence if there was interference. It was now or never, I felt. In a last effort to make him break down, I unbuttoned my jacket and with a swift movement reached for my belt and flipped up a pair of handcuffs. They were both a threat and a weapon.

"You are in a lousy racket," he said with a contempt that was chilling. "You're as bad as one of those damn bounty-hunters in a TV Western. I invited you to my home in the hope you might understand."

"I will—if you talk now."

"Can't you imagine my mother-in-law situation?"

"Give me just a summary and you can go upstairs."

"It was rough from the day Mrs. Cleveland moved in. She was the lonely widow who insisted that her only daughter accompany her to this concert or that bridge party. In a couple of years she was monopolizing Audrey almost every night and when they got home my wife was exhausted.

"Remember, Audrey also had a taxing job handling those junior high cut-ups. Our sole salvation was Friday night, fish night, the end of Audrey's week. After Mrs. Cleveland moved in, however, we couldn't have lobsters at home unless we got Mom a bridge date. For several years we had a weekly game of coming up with a new gimmick to guarantee us our one night of feasting.

"One ruse was the late-at-night trick. I'd have the garage call up about an emergency job that would keep me up half the night. When Mrs. Cleveland toddled off to bed, aided by a few brandies, I'd sneak home with two huge broiled lobsters to be eaten in our bedroom."

Johnson-Jackson paused and smiled at the pleasant remembrance. Then his face grew slack and haggard. "One Wednesday (we'd long ago made the switch from Friday) we'd hardly unwrapped the aluminum foil when the old bitch began to pound on our bedroom door. When we didn't answer, she collapsed on the floor in the hall, panting and gasping. I argued it was one of her convenient heart attacks. Audrey was certain it was genuine and cried that she didn't want to be the cause of her lonely mother's death."

"Was that the final straw?"

"The semi-final. Our next gimmick was a once-a-week program of helping Mom catch up on her beauty sleep. To insure privacy for our big night, we gave the old bitch two sleeping pills. Then Audrey got afraid of an overdose, reduced it to one. That very night the bitch woke up and pounded on our door again. I blew up. I insisted that she get an apartment by herself."

"Did it work for a while?"

"Work? Hell, the old bitch had the heart attack of all heart attacks, this one certified by an electrocardiagram. The remorseful Audrey moved into a separate room. My once-a-week nymphomaniac kept her door locked. After one month of that, I cleared out."

Oliver broke off and slumped forward. With pouches sagging under his eyes, cheeks wrinkled and mouth slack, he seemed to have aged another ten years.

"The chances," he said hoarsely, "were a million to one that I'd ever find another Audrey. I'll never, never encounter another Desiree."

He flipped out his wallet, spread a sizable pile of bills on the table. They were mainly tens and twenties, at least a couple of hundred dollars' worth. He topped them with his driving license and car keys.

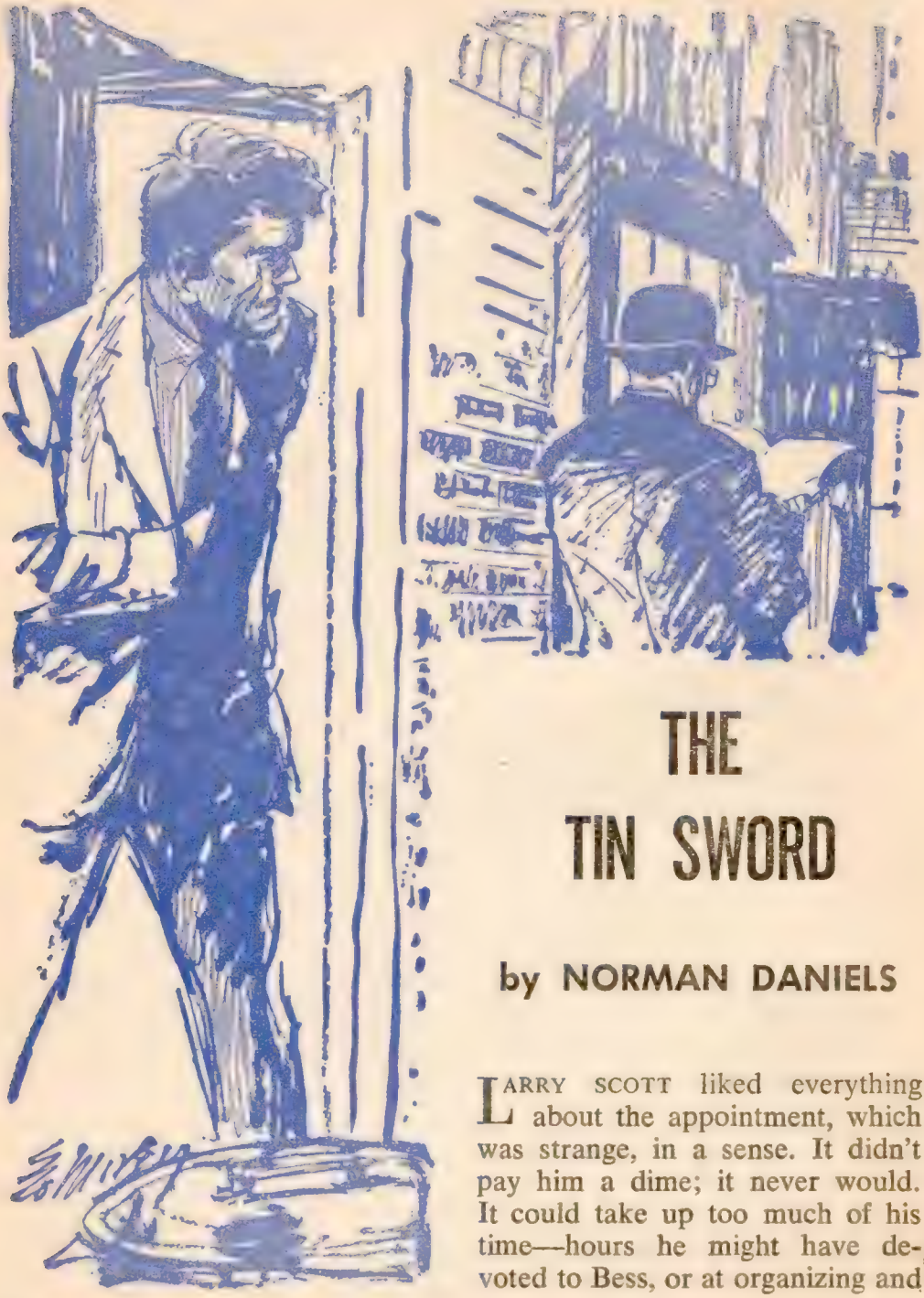
"Here's proof I won't run away. Let the condemned man have just one more night."

"Keep your money. I'm reporting that I couldn't locate Oliver Johnson."

"You're what?"

"I suggest, Mr. John—er, Jackson, that you take a couple of barbituates yourself once or twice a week. And you really shouldn't have lobster splurges two and three times a week at your age. You look like a walking corpse."

"Each morning when I shave, I can see it, too. But if I had a guarantee that I could live to be seventy if I left Desiree, I'd still elect to stay with my Circe. Can you think of a better way to die?"



THE TIN SWORD

by NORMAN DANIELS

LARRY SCOTT liked everything about the appointment, which was strange, in a sense. It didn't pay him a dime; it never would. It could take up too much of his time—hours he might have devoted to Bess, or at organizing and

The silent killer . . . the grinning con man . . . their lives were in his hands. And Larry Scott stared grimly out the window and told himself: every man has his sellout price—or does he?

---

promoting the bowling team of the Scott Oil Company, which he owned.

Still, the sacrifice might well be worth it.

At first, he doubted there was much prestige to the job, or that his connection with it would even be generally known, because the board operated with a minimum of publicity. Too much talk and newspaper comment could actually cramp their style. Larry had thought he should have been rewarded in a somewhat more beneficient way for all the stumping he'd done for the man who become governor. Chairman of the board of pardons didn't seem like much, but already he could see possibilities.

Only this morning, when he left the house, Bess had kissed him in the way she had of making him remember the occasion all day long. Then she'd told him how proud she was of him. That was fine. The local newspaper had carried his picture and a brief story; the house organ of the gasoline station association had been very proud of his appointment, but what really counted was what Jack DeWitt had said.

DeWitt owned a transcontinental moving van company with something like six hundred gasoline and oil trucks. He was a now and then customer, but that was going to change.

This morning he'd shaken Larry's hand and said, "Well now, it seems to me I'd better see to it you get a little more of my business. You're chairman of the board of pardons and one never knows, Larry." He'd poked him in the ribs. "One never knows—say, should my brother-in-law ever land in your place, you could keep him there."

Big joke, but it made sense too. Becoming a man of importance could result in more business coming his way. Why shouldn't he take it? A man looked out for himself in any racket today. All those nights of campaigning, speechmaking—there was no reason why they should be wasted. He'd helped put the governor into office, so why shouldn't he get a little something out of it?

Larry pulled off the highway

on to the long, straight strip of road leading to the prison gates. He liked the way he was recognized, and saluted by the prison guards. There was a parking space with his name on it, the men who worked near the gate and the parking area looked at him with respectful interest. It was all a very large thing.

He could manage it with a minimum waste of time. Each case was first considered by one board member. He would base his recommendations on what the warden said about the convict, what the judge had said at the trial, how the psychiatrists felt about the man, what sort he was before his conviction, who his family was and what he would do if he was turned loose.

Everything would be in a fat folder, every point considered. What was there to the job anyhow? Say yes or no. That's all! The cons weren't people, they were numbers. No personal feelings or issues could have any part in this work. He'd put in—maybe two weeks every six months and part time even on those days.

In return, there'd be prestige, importance. There'd be men like DeWitt kidding him facetiously, but meaningly, even if the words were light.

He'd been conducting these one-man hearings for five days now. At first he'd been unsure of himself and he worried half the night and wished he'd never had any part of this. It was different now. The thankless job did have its points, though he would still worry considerably about being right or wrong.

As with the case of the man who approached him now, in the small hearing room where things were on an informal basis. In his prison uniform, clutching his cap between both hands—all of them did that—the applicant stood before Larry's desk in an attitude of humble respect.

Larry had saved the application of two men for last, feeling they were going to give him trouble. John Haines, 53, married, no children, formerly a successful businessman. Fifteen to twenty for attempted murder. He certainly didn't look like a murderer. He was of medium height, the kind of man who might have been comfortably fat, but prison work had whittled him down to a fit hardness. He had mild blue eyes, a pleasant face, thick white hair.

The record showed he was very well educated. It also showed he'd served his minimum sentence two years ago, yet this was his first application for parole.

"Sit down, Haines," Larry said. "Everything's informal, just a friendly chat. You understand this is only a preliminary hearing. The full board may or may not agree with my findings, whether they go against you or for you."

"I quite understand, sir," Haines said.

"First thing I want to do is solve the mystery of why you haven't applied for parole before. Will you explain that, please?"

"Yes, sir. It's quite simple. My sister married a man who turned out to be a bum. Legally he wasn't responsible for her death, but I stood by and watched him kill my sister with his cruelty. I did my level best to kill him. I shot at him one night, as the record shows. I missed—unfortunately—"

Larry looked at the seated man with interest. "You freely admit your guilt then?"

"I never denied it, sir. If I had been turned loose any time up to three months ago, I would have sought out this man and murdered him. To keep from doing that, I preferred to remain in prison."

"But now you feel you can resist the temptation?"

"This man died three months ago, sir."

Larry closed the file. "That's all, Haines."

Haines stood up quickly, clutching the cap again. Larry wished they'd put their caps in their pockets, or even leave them on. This way they seemed to be choking all the unspoken anguish inside them by wringing the life out of their caps.

When Haines went out, the last man entered. This would be Barney Chapin. He held his cap folded, but lightly, betraying none of the emotion of worry.

Chapin was fifty-seven, short, stockier than he'd looked in the newspaper photographs. He had the cherubic, open countenance of a friar, with one difference. His mouth was a thin, uncompromising line.

"May I sit down?" Chapin asked.

Larry nodded, settled back and gave it to him full blast. "You are Barney Chapin, three to ten for perjury, accepting bribes, malfesance in office, intimidation."

"Now, hold on!" Chapin's face hardened.

"And you be quiet," Larry said tartly. "In plain English, Chapin, you were a grafting, political bagman. To be eligible for parole a man must have a good prison record."

"There's nothing wrong with mine," Chapin said.

"Either you keep your mouth shut or this hearing will end now," Larry warned. He'd been told to make them all toe the line. "An applicant must have a job and a home waiting. You have them. Someone has to be responsible for your behavior; such a man is on record. Just one thing is lacking, Chapin. A parolee must be a good prospect for rehabilitation. He must leave here in a spirit of cooperation."

"You'll find everything in order," Chapin said.

"Yes, the terms of parole are there. Now—you were convicted of cheating your city out of two million dollars. None of it has been accounted for. You maintain your attitude has changed and you are worthy of parole. Prove it, Chapin."

"May I call my attorney?" Chapin asked.

"You may answer this one question. Who got the money?"

Chapin's mouth fashioned itself into a loose grin.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said, and walked out of the hearing room.

At six-forty, Larry turned into the driveway of his house in the suburbs, complete with an encumbrance and a lawn that grew madly. The Manson boy from next door had mowed it. The ridges of uncut grass stood up like a Mohawk haircut. The kid needed glasses. Anyway, this was work he should be doing, instead of that nerve-racking task of trying to decide who should go free and who shouldn't.

There were taller girls than Bess, slimmer girls, prettier ones and even more intelligent ones. But not many. Larry knew—he'd looked. She kissed him now in that way of hers that told him how happy she was to have him home again.

She looked at him critically. "Hm. No zip. Have a hard day at the prison?"

He shook his head. "Not so hard as confusing. It'll work out though. It's like the life of a cop with brass on his shoulders. People do you favors because they figure they might need one some day."

"Come and eat," she said, "and stop bragging about your influence. It doesn't become you."

He told her about Haines and Chapin over their coffee. "I could make up my mind about those two, quicker than you can add that spoonful of sugar to your cup."

"Oh," she asked, "as simple as that?"

"Sure. Haines goes free, Chapin stays in."

"Then what's the problem, Mr. Chairman?"

"Four other men. The rest of the parole board. I can't figure how they'll vote. Take Judge Bancroft, State supreme court bench, retired. He's fit by experience to judge people, but he acts as if he's still on the bench. Every applicant for parole is on trial again, far as he's concerned. Now, for contrast, there's Riordan, retired chief of police. Let 'em all rot in there, is his motto. Now take a look at Garrison. There's a honey, a liquor wholesaler. He'd rather talk the price of Scotch than whether a man is to be set free."

"My," Bess said, "you've got it bad."

"Would you like to have the deciding vote among those men? And be sure to include the fourth mem-

ber. Mr. Hugh Stackpoole the Third. He is on the board because some member of his family has always served on some state commission. I think his mind is on his last polo game, or whatever he plays at, while the convicts are saying their piece."

She was gathering up the dishes and he followed her into the kitchen. Being chairman of the parole board cut no ice here. He wiped as usual.

"I think it's a well balanced board," she said.

"Well, it's got something for everyone," he agreed. "And what am I worried about? The job's more or less honorary. All the decisions are made for us by the warden, the doctor, the politicans sometimes. We just okay it and make the whole thing look good. Hell's bells, I'm no knight of the reformation wielding a shiny sword."

The first call came at eight-ten. The last one—after which he left the phone off the cradle—was at two-twenty. He talked to aldermen, policemen, state congressmen, an ex-mayor, a lieutenant-governor from a long ago administration. There was one call from Washington, given governmental superiority over the one Larry was having with a ward heeler.

When he gave up and went to bed, he couldn't sleep. All of the calls concerned Barney Chapin. All said he was a reformed man who deserved a break. There were even some references to the favors he owed the governor who had appointed Larry to this post.

Every one of these calls meant money in the bank. An alderman could send city trucks to his gas stations. He had sixteen, so he could service the whole city if necessary —the whole state. There was a hint, from a man who could swing it, about a certain corner property which would be a gold mine for the man who put a service station there. Money in the bank, and all he had to do was let a man go free. Any parole board would let Chapin go.

Bess apparently wasn't sleeping either.

"I can almost hear the wheels going," she said.

He laughed, turned on the light and sat up. "Uh-uh, sweetie, those weren't wheels. They were cash registers."

She studied his face for a moment. "You won't get a nickel out of it, Larry."

"There's been talk of more nickels than I could count."

"I still maintain, when it's all over, you won't make a nickel."

"Well, why shouldn't I?" he asked. "What's wrong with it? Politics are politics."

"Some politics are politics," she agreed, "some politics smell. Go to sleep. How do you expect to weigh the fate of the glamorous and kindly Barney Chapin in the morning?"

He settled down again. "Not a nickel, eh? Lady, how wrong you could be. Chapin swiped two million. Who got it? People who were smart enough to stay out of jail. Who cares? Half the taxpayers have forgotten who Barney Chapin is. The two million is gone. What good does it do to keep poor old Barney in the coop? After all, he did do some good in his time. Look hard enough and you find something nice to say about almost anyone . . . what? Oh, go ahead and snore. Falling asleep on me."

He ate breakfast hurriedly. "Got to do a little work at Number One Station before I leave for the prison," he said.

"Work—like meeting a few people who talked to you on the phone last night?" Trouble with Bess, she could read your mind.

"I suppose somebody will turn up. Look, I'm an important man. Let's face it."

"Not a nickel," she said.

"What?" he asked absentmindedly.

"Out of this parole board business—not a nickel."

"I guess you're right. But, a little extra business coming my way—"

"I'll bet you that nickel you're not going to make," she said.

"You're nuts," he told her and went out the back door to the garage.

This was much more than a nickel affair. He'd have bet his last gas pump that everyone else on the board would feel the same way if approached. They wouldn't be, of course. He was the chairman. He could swing it. Nobody had to know, not even Bess.

It wouldn't be in the form of a bribe anyway. Just a tip where more business would be waiting for him. Whom to see, how to manage something like that fabulous site for a new station. No money changed hands. He'd simply be in a position to take advantage of certain factors by exerting his personal business acumen.

At ten-thirty, Larry took his place at the head of the long table in the main hearing room. Judge Bancroft, at his right, was busy opening a thick, worn brief case. He was a tall, lean man with shaggy brows surmounting cold blue eyes, like hedge rows. He bent his scrawny neck in a dignified nod.

"Good morning, Mr. Chairman," he murmured.

Chief Riordan, at the foot of the table, worried his cold cigar and said nothing. He wasn't a communicative man. He was a rough man, however. Heavy-set, but in good shape for his age. His main trouble, Larry had decided the first day, was the fact that the officiousness of his office as chief of police had never left him, even after he retired.

Across from the Judge, Hugh Stackmoore the Third smoked a thin cigarette, banded near the filter and dressed up with his initials.

Stackmoore was about fifty and looked thirty, in a lean, hard-muscled way. He looked fine in a polo player's helmet, and he still played an excellent game.

In a far corner of the room, where there was a telephone, Garrison was conucting his wholesale liquor business, with especial emphasis on the prices of Spanish sherry.

As he sat down, he had the smug look of a man who has just arranged a fine discount.

"If we're ready," Larry said, "we'll have the first man in."

They recessed at one for a brief lunch, served right at the table in the hearing room. The parade started again. Before each applicant was summoned, the man who had held the preliminary hearing would give his views and the case would be discussed. It was going along well.

At four o'clock, Larry picked up the file on John Haines. He said, "This one is unusual, gentlemen. Haines passed up several chances for parole because the man he'd been sent to prison for trying to kill, was still alive, and Haines knew he'd go after him if he was released. Now that man has died a natural death and Haines feels he can be trusted with his freedom. I think he can too."

"It says here," Riordan indicated his file, "he tried to kill his brother-in-law."

"If he had killed him," Larry said, "I think he would have been cleared by a verdict of justifiable homicide. At any rate, we're only concerned with his present status. He's a business man—"

"What kind of business?" Garrison thumbed through his papers.

"Masons' supplies," Stackmoore laughed. "He uses water to mix his cement."

"Not funny," Garrison grumbled.

"I don't like a man who attempts homicide," Riordan said. "I want to know more. Let's pass him for the time being."

"And get on with Barney Chapin," Garrison agreed. "Now there's a nice hot potato."

"Garbage," Stackmoore said tersely.

"Now hold on a second," Riordan said. "Barney's an unusual guy. I admire his guts. He took this rap without a squawk."

"You admire him?" Larry asked in surprise. "Is that the right word?"

"Yes, as I apply it. Guts, that's what he's got."

"I talked to him yesterday," Larry said. "He shows absolutely no sign of remorse, he never acknowledged his guilt, and he is in no manner changed. I cannot, in deference to my sense of honesty, say that Chapin has been rehabilitated one whit."

"Rehabilitation is for crooks and men of violence," Riordan said.

"I don't know about the violence," Larry said, "but as for be-

ing a crook, Chapin is about the biggest one behind these walls in my opinion."

"What are you giving me?" Riordan said angrily.

"He swiped two million dollars. That's more than any other thief in here got away with."

"But Barney served his time. He's no different than anybody else."

"He's a lot different than anybody else," Larry said. "I'm asking for a vote."

"Let him go," Riordan said.

Garrison looked at his watch. "How much longer is this going on? I've missed two appointments."

Larry said, "We're voting, Mr. Garrison. What's your opinion?"

"Barney?" Garrison shrugged. "He did his time."

"Judge?" Larry turned to the old jurist.

He'd been waiting for it. Judge Bancroft cleared his throat, spread some papers before him and put on a solemn expression. "The case of Bernard Chapin is of more than average importance, I will concede. But he is not a criminal in the popular sense of the word."

"If he's no criminal," Larry said, "we'd better open the gates and get out of the way."

The judge was vastly annoyed. "Mr. Chairman, let me conclude, please. What I inferred, was that Chapin is not the violent menace this John Haines appears to be."

Stackmoore clasped his fingers at the back of his head. "Just let's say Barney's a benign menace."

"If I don't get out of here in the next half hour—" Garrison said.

"Why'd you take the appointment, if you're that busy?" Larry demanded angrily.

"Well, it's an honor, of sorts, I guess. But it's also time-consuming and I'm a busy man."

Larry thought of the two million things he had to do. They assumed proportions of a size comparable to the two million dollars Chapin stole.

"It is the duty of every citizen," Judge Bancroft began.

"You should talk," Garrison shouted. "You're drawing a nice, fat pension. This is just something to do, far as you're concerned, but me—I've got so many angles—"

"We were voting," Larry reminded them. "I take it you vote to release Chapin, Judge."

Bancroft nodded.

"That's three in favor of parole. Stackmoore?"

Stackmoore crushed out his half smoked cigarette, leaning forward to reach the overflowing ash tray. He regarded Larry seriously for a moment. "A hundred years ago," he said, "they'd have just strung Barney up and saved all this trouble, but these are modern times and Barney's a shrewd, smart politician who stubbed his toe."

"Yeah," Larry said. "He's got guts. Because he won't tell who's enjoying all that taxpayer's money,

he's got guts. Stackmoore votes yes. I vote no! It takes other things beside guts to be a bum like Barney. It takes a corruption of the soul, a twisting of morals and a disrespect for the law, besides an utter contempt for his fellow men."

"Look who's talking," Garrison cried out. "You're for letting Haines go. A would-be murderer."

"We haven't voted on Haines yet," Larry said.

"You'll vote in his favor." Riordan's voice was tinged with sarcasm.

Bancroft's soft voice came soothingly and unheard. "These are two distinctly different issues."

Garrison walked around the desk to stand beside Larry. "I'm a busy man. We can vote for Haines in ten seconds and go home. Are we agreed?"

"No!" Larry said.

"We'll let both of them go," Riordan said. "Your man gets a break, our man gets a break."

"Neither of these convicts is my man, or your man." Larry was on his feet. He strode over to face Riordan, who got up swiftly. "I don't like you," Larry went on. "At this minute, I don't like you one little bit."

"Aw, wake up," Riordan said. "Who cares about a guy like Barney? He's just a cheap collector."

Stackmoore watched it all with an amused expression. He said, "It's late, boys. I suggest we adjourn until tomorrow."

"No," Garrison shouted. "I can't afford to lose another day."

Judge Bancroft shook his head too. "I may be retired, but there are important things I still have to do."

"Somebody got a suggestion then?" Stackmoore asked.

Garrison said, "Let both of them go. Get it over with. I'm losing money."

Larry returned to his place at the head of the table. "We're all tired. Tomorrow at ten-thirty, we'll meet again and settle the cases of Haines and Chapin."

"Waste another day?" Garrison shouted.

"Tomorrow at ten-thirty," Larry said firmly and walked from the hearing room.

Halfway home, he suddenly realized what he'd just done. He'd stood up to all the others and defied them to set Chapin free, when Chapin's freedom was the one thing to insure the future of Larry Scott. Why had he done this, he asked himself. It didn't make sense. And then he thought it did. By not falling in with the idea too soon, the whole thing would look better.

In the end, it would be the best way. But if Barney Chapin started putting on too much pressure, he could stay in prison. Larry decided he wouldn't be pushed too far. Anyway, maybe the whole thing would fizzle. If those who contacted him knew how the board

was already voting, they'd probably tell him to get lost.

There were five calls already waiting for him when he got home. The man who had an idea that corner lot might be sold, was sure of it now and hinted there was even a chance it could be leased, cheap, for a couple of decades so very little cash would be required.

Larry hung up, threw the other phone numbers in the waste basket and let the phone ring. Bess had two big martinis made. They didn't make it a habit of drinking except when they felt they really needed one. Tonight he was very grateful for it.

"Went badly," he said. "I hoped we could finish today. You know what they suggested? They'd let my man go if I'd let Chapin go. What do they think they're dealing in—horses? I'm making them come back tomorrow and if you want my opinion, our governor is stupid and playing politics, and I'm sorry I ever campaigned for him. I'm even sorry I voted for him."

"I like him," Bess said. "His wife dresses well too. Nothing flashy, just knows good clothes."

"That's nice," Larry said. "I'm glad she knows how to dress. Makes the governor a wiser man."

"Oh, I think he's wise enough. Larry, how did the last parole board do? The one under the previous administration."

"Fine. They never had an argument."

"And wasn't there a great deal of criticism about it?"

"Every parole board is criticized. How can five men operate without making a mistake? Only this time I'm fighting four of the most stubborn, mule-headed, don't-give-a-damn men I've ever met. And I wish that phone would stop ringing."

"Money in every tinkle of the bell," she said.

He regarded her with some surprise. "You want me to answer those calls?"

"I'm not a member of the parole board, Larry. I'm a wife who minds her own business."

"Well," he said, "I'm going to make a phone call for a change. I'm going to talk to our governor and tell him he can have his lousy job back after tomorrow. And then I'm going to the prison in the morning and they can turn the whole population of it out for all of me."

The governor was happy to hear from him. "I hear you're doing a fine job, Larry. Keep it up. I'm going to be proud of you."

There was more talk. When Larry returned to the kitchen and the inevitable dishes, Bess glanced at him. "So now you're the ex-chairman of the parole board."

"I didn't have a chance to get a word in edgewise," he said. "I'll take it up with him later."

They took the phone off the cradle and finally went to bed early so the doorbell would also stop ring-

ing. It kept right on. There were four telegrams stuck under the door the next morning. Larry Scott left them unopened on the table in the hall.

Stackmoore apparently had arrived at the prison much earlier than the rest of them. When they were all assembled, he said, "I took the liberty of having Barney brought to the waiting room so we can interview him."

"I think you took too much for granted," Garrison objected. "That's going to take time and start this whole argument all over again. I want to get out of here."

They sent for Barney and he came in meekly, humbly, but his eyes hardened just a trifle as they passed over Larry. He took his place at the table and Judge Bancroft assumed the role of questioner, though no one had asked him to.

"Chapin," he said, "do you have a job waiting?"

"Yes, Your Honor, I do." Chapin was on his toes now, running scared.

"You're a family man?"

"Wife and two kids, sir."

He didn't say children, Larry noticed. He called them kids. The down-to-earth policy which indicated he wasn't in the judge's league.

"Are you a wealthy man?"

Stackmoore broke every rule of procedure for interviewing a convict. He laughed out loud. Larry

began to regard Stackmoore in a new light.

"You will answer the question," Bancroft ordered Chapin.

"I haven't got a dime," Chapin said.

"Now wait a minute," Stackmoore interrupted the judge. "Chapin, you were convicted of stealing two million dollars. You went to prison for the crime. Obviously, you haven't spent it all. I'd even have trouble spending that much in the time you had to do it in, and I'm an acknowledged expert. Therefore, if you stole the money and you do not have any left, what happened to it?"

Bancroft saved Chapin the chagrin of not answering. He said, "Mr. Stackmoore, I am questioning this man. Mr. Chapin, do you intend to enter politics again?"

Chapin shook his head slowly from side to side. Some of his confidence was returning.

"No, sir, I do not," he said.

Larry said, "Oh, come off it, Judge. Chapin's lost his franchise. He can't go into politics."

Garrison had been on the brink of interrupting and with Bancroft temporarily stopped by Larry's comment, Garrison got in his question.

"What kind of business do you intend to enter, Chapin?"

"The motel business, sir," Chapin said, and the slyness came back into his eyes. "My brother has a string of fine motels. We intend to have the best there is, sir. Good food—"

He didn't say fine wines and liquors, but he implied it. Larry knew that Chapin would be a crook to the end of his days. Furthermore, he'd almost made one out of him. Stackmoore got up in disgust and walked to the window. He looked out a moment, then turned his head back toward the table.

"Why don't you show him your samples, Garrison?" he asked.

"I resent that," Garrison shouted.

Stackmoore returned to the table and glared at Chapin. "I want to know who got the money you stole, Chapin. Mr. Scott is right." He glanced at Larry. "You're no more honest now than when you entered prison. You're just faithful to that old adage which insists one crook won't talk about another.

"In your case, one of our members calls it guts. I call it working for a living. So long as you keep quiet, serve your time and say nothing, you're being paid. Somehow you're profiting because if you weren't, you'd shout your head off for a share of that money or your freedom. The money, Chapin. Where is it?"

Larry touched the buzzer button on the table and summoned a guard.

"Take Chapin out," he ordered. "Hold him in the waiting room."

Chapin almost, but not quite, smirked at the whole affair. Larry knew how his cute mind was thinking. The board would wrangle itself into a stalemate and end up by letting him go. His walk was almost jaunty as he left the room.

Riordan spoke as the door closed. "I still say he's served his time."

"His minimum time," Larry argued. "Riordan, you were a law enforcement officer most of your life. What's your opinion of cheap ward heeling politicians who get others to steal for them, rig elections, pay off the worthy and deprive those who won't cooperate?"

"I don't know what you mean," Riordan frowned.

"Doesn't crooked politics breed crime? Won't the palm-extended type of politician take money from a hoodlum, as well as he'll accept it from a businessman who needs good will?"

"It's been that way," Riordan said, "for so long it's just accepted, I guess."

"Let me tell you why. Nobody thinks about it hard enough to do anything. Besides, what can an ordinary man accomplish? But we're not ordinary men while we're in this room. We can keep Chapin here and do our level best to make him talk."

"Indeed we cannot," Judge Bancroft interrupted angrily. "This is neither a police station nor a district attorney's office. We are governed by law—"

"Judge," Larry said, "this place is full of men who care nothing for the letter of the law, but they'll resent this board if we let a man go free because he won't tell the truth."

Larry cut in again. "According to the letter of the law, a man should answer a question when he is legally directed to do so."

"In a court of law, perhaps. I would have to review the law concerning the rights of a convict."

"Never mind that, Judge. Look at the transcript of the trial. Chapin was directed seventeen times by the judge to answer this same question and seventeen times he stood mute. He refused to answer us. Does that indicate reformation and rehabilitation?"

Bancroft touched the tips of his fingers together.

"Odd," he said, "how that fact should have slipped by me. He actually stood in contempt of court."

It had sunk in at last, and Larry knew he had another ally. Bancroft looked around the table.

"I recommend, gentlemen, that Chapin's application be passed over with prejudice."

"Hey, now," Garrison broke in. "That means he'll have to serve two-thirds of his sentence before he can get out."

"We could stipulate that he may voluntarily appear before this board at any session and purge himself," Larry said. "If he does, we can always re-open the case."

Riordan stuck a fresh cigar between his teeth. "I still say Chapin did his stretch."

"Do you also insist Haines stays if Chapin does?"

"That's right," Riordan said angrily.

"Then you're as bad a conniver as Chapin," Larry said. "Worse! Chapin just stole money. You're stealing a man's freedom."

"Well, so are you," Riordan shouted. "You steal Chapin's, I steal Haines'."

"Haines will leave prison and become a quiet, orderly business man who'll never give trouble again. Chapin will walk out into the arms of the thieves he's been protecting. An outstanding example of a man who stole a fortune, literally got away with it, and is free to enjoy the profits of his crime."

"He served his time and should be treated like everyone else," Ri-

ordan insisted. "I won't change my mind about that. The crime itself has no bearing."

Larry no longer wanted desperately to get out of here and away from all this wrangling and this responsibility over men's lives. He realized now that it was a sense of duty that kept him here, held him to his convictions and made him fight for them.

He tried a new approach. "Chief, he served two years. I'll bet his cut on the money he grafted, will net him no less than a hundred thousand a year for the time he spent in prison. Compare that with what you get in your pension after—how many years?"

"Thirty," Riordan said. He paused and nodded thoughtfully as his mind looked into the still vivid past. "Thirty years. A long time. A long, long time. Chapin doesn't even know what time is."

"And Haines?"

"That's an entirely different case. I vote for his parole."

Larry looked down the table at Garrison, who stared back at him and then glared at everyone else.

"How about you?" Larry asked.

"Chapin's a slob. He's the patsy. The guys behind him are the ones who ought to be in here. Chapin's finished for good, even among his own breed of crooks. He harmed no one physically and he served his time."

Stackmoore gathered up his papers. "Chapin hit everybody where it hurts—in the pocketbook. You sell liquor to retail stores, Mr. Garrison, so Chapin also hit you—even more severely than the average man. Since he and his friends looted the city treasury, they've had to impose additional taxes. One of them is a special tax on booze."

Garrison settled back, his anger subsiding. Larry and Stackmoore exchanged glances and Larry took up the argument.

"Keeping Chapin here to serve out his sentence, unless he talks, means we're taking a punch at the system he represents. That's what we have to fight—the systems that create men like Chapin. You have to do it with a will of steel. So far, we've been waving a tin sword at them. Refusing to turn Chapin loose is a good, solid, two-edged, steel blade. It will back up the will of our people who hate paying tax money into a till that has no bottom, only the greedy hands of grafters."

"I move we vote," Judge Bancroft said.

Larry called each by name. It was unanimous.

"I'm glad that's over," he said. "I don't mind telling you, gentlemen, that I've developed a king-sized headache over this. I've had so many telephone calls—"

"All I did the last two nights was answer the phone," Riordan said quickly. "It was like old times—people who used to ask me favors."

Garrison looked around the table. "Boys, did all of us develop telephone ears this session?"

They all nodded. Riordan said, "I could have become a consultant to a county attorney, whatever that is, and keep my pension too. What did they offer you, Stackmoore?"

"The presidency of a polo club. Been after it for years."

Judge Bancroft shook his head. "I'll be truthful too, gentlemen. Someone wanted my memoirs, at a very handsome figure, I must say. Do you know, I hadn't even associated it with this case."

Garrison sighed deeply. "I could have cleaned out my warehouse of stuff I have a hard time giving away. It almost worked on me. I tell you, I was sorely tempted. Then I got sore and I phoned the governor . . ."

"You phoned the governor?" Larry asked. "Anybody else do that?"

They all had. Larry looked around the table and laughed. "Well, we took this job as a political pay-off. That's what we thought. I figured we'd be the worst parole board in the history of penology, and my opinion of the governor for appointing us was something less than complimentary.

"But he was right. He chose us because we didn't think alike. We got mad and we talked loud and we said what we thought, and the truth came out. Chapin stays in prison because of that. Our governor, gentlemen, knew all along how we'd handle it."

"I'm going to admit I was tempted," Stackmoore said.

"By the presidency of a polo club?" Riordan asked.

"My weak point. Those people who offered us these bribes knew what it was. I'll bet they knew the weak points of every one of us."

"But they didn't know the strong points," Larry said. "At first, I felt I'd go alone, let Barney go. Then, all of a sudden, I found myself fighting him and, do you know, I actually forgot what Barney's freedom could mean to me. I never thought of it once, only of the fact that Barney was an unrepentant thief. I believe it happened that way to all of us."

Stackmoore said, "Bets were, Chapin would go free. Everyone said the governor couldn't put together a board strong enough to resist the pressure. I think we proved them to be wrong and I'm proud of it."

"Speaking of bets," Larry said, "I have to go home. I owe my wife a nickel."

A NEW COMPLETE LONG MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET NEXT MONTH

featuring

ED NOON

CORPSES ARE FOR KILLING

He was young, handsome, my big hitchhiker. He was a real good companion, until I suddenly realized that he had killed once today—and that I was next!

by MICHAEL AVALLONE

I NODDED, checking his six-foot-four physique, mild face and the curiously long package he was toting.

"Get in," I said. "I'm going as far as Poughkeepsie and you're welcome to the ride."

"Thank you. My name is Jerome. I've been waiting here for an hour. No one else seemed to want to stop."

"People are afraid of hitchhikers. Don't you read the papers?"

He clambered onto the seat alongside me, filling the front of the Olds with what must have been at least two hundred and fifty pounds of male bulk. He was real massive, this boy. Jerome wasn't built in a day.

"You're not afraid of me, are you?" he said softly, his eyes on the wide Thruway which stretched ahead of us. An armada of cars, trucks and station wagons flowed endlessly. I shifted the Olds into

gear and moved out into the river of General Motors products.

"No, I'm not," I admitted. "I'm a private detective. I carry a .45 and if you get cute, I'll use it."

"Why did you pick me up?"

"I feel sorry for anyone who doesn't have transportation in the jet age. That answer your question?"

"You're kind," he said without humility. "Not many people are that way nowadays."

I kept the gas pedal at sixty per the hour and eyed his face where it was reflected in the rear view mirror. He was big, all right. I'd seldom seen anyone bigger. He wore no hat and his hair was a wild thatch of uncombed blondness. Beatle-style. His clothes were quite civilized though. Sharkskin. New-looking. And his tie was neat and easily all silk.

The real curious thing about him was the long package. It was the sort of bundled up object that could have been anything from a golf club to a high-powered rifle.

"How come you're walking?" I asked. "Car break down?"

"Yes," he said vaguely. "Back there at the crossing. Where the road breaks out of the woods. I decided to come to the highway to try my luck."

"There's a gas station another ten miles. We'll stop there and you can go back for your car."

"No," he said.

"Why not?"

"It's an old car. Fifty-two Plymouth. I'd just as soon leave it where it is. It isn't worth saving."

"There's a law against leaving heaps and walking away from them," I reminded him. "The cops could take your license away."

"Big deal." His laugh was unconcerned. "It's not my car. It was registered in my wife's name."

"Oh," I said, beginning to wonder if he wasn't some sort of kook. But I kept my eye on the road. The traffic was building up into a wolf pack of steadily zooming vehicles. The hot sun didn't make it any easier. The roadway was glaring with bright light.

"Won't your wife care?" I asked.

"No. She's dead."

"I'm sorry."

Jerome grunted, his hands rustling the wrapped object standing at his side.

"Nothing to be sorry about. Everybody dies sooner or later, don't they?"

"Yeah," I agreed. "But it's how they died that makes the difference."

The yellow thatch of hair wagged.

"You read a lot, don't you? Know a lot, too. I can see that, Mister. That's good. Maybe I can talk to you."

"Maybe." I was now reduced to the role of the Good Samaritan who begins to feel and know that there is indeed great folly some-

times in extending a helping hand to total strangers.

Especially strangers who are six four, weigh two-fifty and tote funny-looking packages.

"Don't you want the radio on?" Jerome reached a big forefinger for the dashboard. "Usually a lot of good music this time of day."

"Go ahead. If you feel like it. I'm game."

"Thank you." He probed, poked and selected a station. Rock 'n' Roll music poured. He winced and found another sort of music. WQXR or some such. A Beethoven Symphony filled the confines of the Olds.

"There," he said triumphantly. "That's music."

I laughed. "No arguments from me. Well, tell me about yourself, Jerome. I'm a detective. I'm going to Poughkeepsie to try to help an old friend who needs a hand with some blackmailer. But how about you?"

"I'm an engineer," Jerome said. "Civil. I was on my way to Albany to see about a new job. Just lost the old one."

"Too bad. All bad breaks, huh?"

He flung a look at me. "What do you mean?"

"Well, losing your job, your wife—"

"Oh, that. Forget about her. I'm better off without her. That woman ruined me. Her dying is about the only good thing that's happened to me this year."

"That's kind of a crummy thing to say, isn't it?" I suggested.

"Not necessarily. Depends on the point of view, Mr—"

"Noon."

"Noon. Astrid was a bitch on wheels. And when a bitch is wheeled, she can run a man into the ground."

"Now who's making with the philosophy?" I eyed him. "What's in the package?"

"Yardsticks," he said. "Some very expensive ones. They're worth much more to me than the Plymouth was."

"I can see that."

He patted the long package affectionately. I didn't like the way he looked doing that. It gave me an image of a tomcat in an alley lining up some local action.

We passed another hitchhiker. A lonely, sweatered beatnik, his right foot anchored atop a battered straw suitcase, his right thumb on the wag. We shot by him. It was really no place to stop. The traffic was bulleting along.

"Mr. Noon?"

"Yeah?"

"You've guessed, haven't you?"

"Sort of."

"And you're not afraid?"

"Not the way you mean," I said, giving the wheel a nudge to bypass a slow-moving Dodge in the right hand lane.

"I don't understand that," Jerome said, clutching the crazy wrapped package which I knew wasn't a golf club or yardsticks but the long gun of some kind that I knew it had been all along. "Would you please explain?"

"All right. I take it your wife is sitting in the Plymouth back there. Dead, probably. Possibly shot by you with whatever you're toting in that package. It is a gun, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said in that mild, unworried voice of his. "Hunting rifle. Winchester .30 model. Used for hunting deer. Don't know how it happened. We were arguing, same as ever. We've been arguing since the day we were married. Before I knew what I intended to do, I just touched the trigger. Damn near blew her head off. After that, I just kind of moved in a daze. Parked the car, wrapped the gun up in the shopping paper we always carried in the trunk. And you picked me up on the road. I didn't really know what I was going to do. I still don't. But I couldn't sit in the same car with her, all messed up like she was. You understand that, don't you?"

"I do," I said, "but I'm no court of last resort. Smartest thing you can do is turn yourself in. That way, at least, you can cop a plea. It wasn't premeditated, was it?"

"Wasn't it?" His voice rose from its flat level for the first time. "When you suddenly do something like that, haven't you really been thinking of it for years?"

"I guess so. You can't run far enough, you know. They'll catch you, sooner or later." A radar-equipped car was visible on the divider between the North and South lanes, just waiting for speeders. I could see the highway patrolman enjoying a quiet cigarette. Jerome saw him too but said nothing. In a flash, the car and the cop were receding at the rate of sixty miles per hour in the rear view mirror.

"You going to try to kill me, Jerome?"

"How could I?" he asked helplessly. "You're driving; the rifle's tied up in this package and I'm not crazy, you know."

"No. But you're twice as big as I am. And I'm no hero. Let's talk this over."

"I'll listen to you," he said. "I need some help."

"Okay." I took a deep breath. "Next cop we see, let me turn you in. I'll tell them you flagged me down, told me what happened and you wanted me to call a cop right away. Who knows? You might even get a good lawyer to get the

whole thing called a sorry accident. People are always having trouble with hunting rifles."

He laughed, a short, hard laugh.

"You don't really believe that, do you, Noon?"

"No. But I do know that running away slips the noose around your neck for sure. That way, you get no mercy at all. You know that, don't you?"

"Let me think. Keep on driving."

I kept on driving. He thought. But not for long. In less than a minute, he had reached a decision.

"Freedom means a lot to me, Mister," he said suddenly. "I'll take my chances. If you try anything, like reaching for that .45 you're carrying, I'll get rough. My eyes are on you all the time now. Remember that."

"You are making a large mistake, Jerome."

"It's mine to make," he reminded me.

So it was that my ride to Poughkeepsie with a hitchhiker who had murdered his wife on a fine sunny day landed me in the middle of another homicide. The New York cops are right. I'm a magnet for the murder crowd.

"Get a news station," I suggested. "You might as well find out what your chances are."

He did as I told him, flicking the symphonic music off for WNEW. It is probably too early for his dead wife to have been discovered but you never can tell for sure. Parked cars near highways do draw a lot of attention.

This one had.

Within a few minutes, an announcer's crisp voice was rattling out the details. Jerome listened as if it was something that concerned two other guys.

". . . of a woman found in a Plymouth just off the New York State Thruway near White Plains. The woman, identified as Mrs. Astrid Baldwin, was sprawled behind the wheel. She had been shot through the head. Police indicate the possibility of foul play, but the White Plains district is a hunter's preserve and there is the likelihood of a stray bullet causing the death of Mrs. Baldwin. In nearby Bridgeport, residents today reported the sighting of an unidentified flying—"

Jerome switched stations again. Symphonic music blared once more. He grunted thoughtfully. I bit my lip. The news broadcast had changed my thinking considerably. Little old Jerome had proven to be the coldest-blooded killer of all.

"There," he said. "I'm still in the clear, like you said, but even better. Why, hell, I might even be able to stay out of this altogether. Let them blame a hunter."

"It's your gun," I said. "Ballistics will match shells. The bands, the grooves. All you've bought is time."

"You're wrong," he crowed. "This rifle's not mine. I found it in the woods in Maine last summer. Never reported it, never told anyone about it. Not even Astrid."

"What are you going to do with it now?" I asked, eyes on the road.

"Drop it in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean next week," he said, almost dreamily. I had to agree with that. He was dreaming.

"And what happens to me now that you've told me all?"

"You?" He looked surprised. "Why should you care? I'm not going to hurt you! Astrid's dying shouldn't mean a thing to you or the cops. No reward money, no credit. You're a private detective, right? Well, be smart. Drop me off in Poughkeepsie and forget the whole thing. You don't look stupid, Mr. Noon. Why make trouble for yourself? Like you said, I could break you in half with my bare hands."

"Check, Roger and you're so right."

He smiled at that. "Good.

I made my move at the next sharp turn. The road suddenly hairpinned and called for real English if you were doing sixty as I was. Jerome had to roll with the turn, taking his eyes off me as he did so. It was all I needed.

As the Olds swerved, I streaked my hand into my shoulder holster, brought the .45 out and slammed it directly across the bridge of his nose. His sudden yelp was pure fright and amazement. After that, he said very little. His big body was a lump of unconsciousness next to me on the front seat.

Five miles ahead was the toll booth leading into Poughkeepsie. Luck was with me. A State Patrol car was parked to the left of the Administration Office. I got some service in a hurry. The troopers were goggled-eyed and delighted. Nailing nothing but traffic violators had primed them for the excitement of catching a wife killer.

Jerome came to, finding himself manacled and brought down. He shook his head dumbly, looking for me. When he spotted me standing next to the Olds, smoking a Camel, he waved to me. There was a pitiful look in his eyes. The welt across his nose almost made me feel sorry for him. Almost, but not quite.

"Why did you do it, pal?" he asked hoarsely. "Why should you do their work for them? You didn't know what a bitch she was, how she deserved to die—"

"You lied to me," I said. "You didn't touch off any gun or just suddenly lose your head and kill. It was premeditated all the way."

"Huh?" His eyes were bewildered.

"Yeah," I agreed. "The news broadcast. Didn't say a thing about her being shot at close range, like you said. They wouldn't have skipped that. Only thing is, you must have parked the car on some

(Concluded on Page 135)

You May Have Missed
These Three MIKE SHAYNE Stories

3 BACK COPIES FOR ONLY $1

If you've just discovered MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE you may not have read any of the previously published issues. And if you are a real dyed-in-the-wool Shayne fan—and who isn't?—you'll want to read them. We have a very limited supply left of some of these back copies and they are yours—by filling out the conveniently printed coupon. Each issue also contains—besides a new Mike Shayne adventure—short stories, novelets and short novels by prominent writers in the mystery, crime and detective story field.

No. 1 . . . THE MOGHUL BOX by Brett Halliday (April 1965)
The case was tied in with a fortune in precious stones. So right from the start Shayne took unusual precautions. But a killer in hiding is enough to make worries pile up.

No. 2 . . . STRING OF PEARLS by Brett Halliday (May 1965)
Shayne was sure that the thefts were tied up with murder, and possibly espionage. But what he really worried about were the strange "far out" aspects of the baffling case.

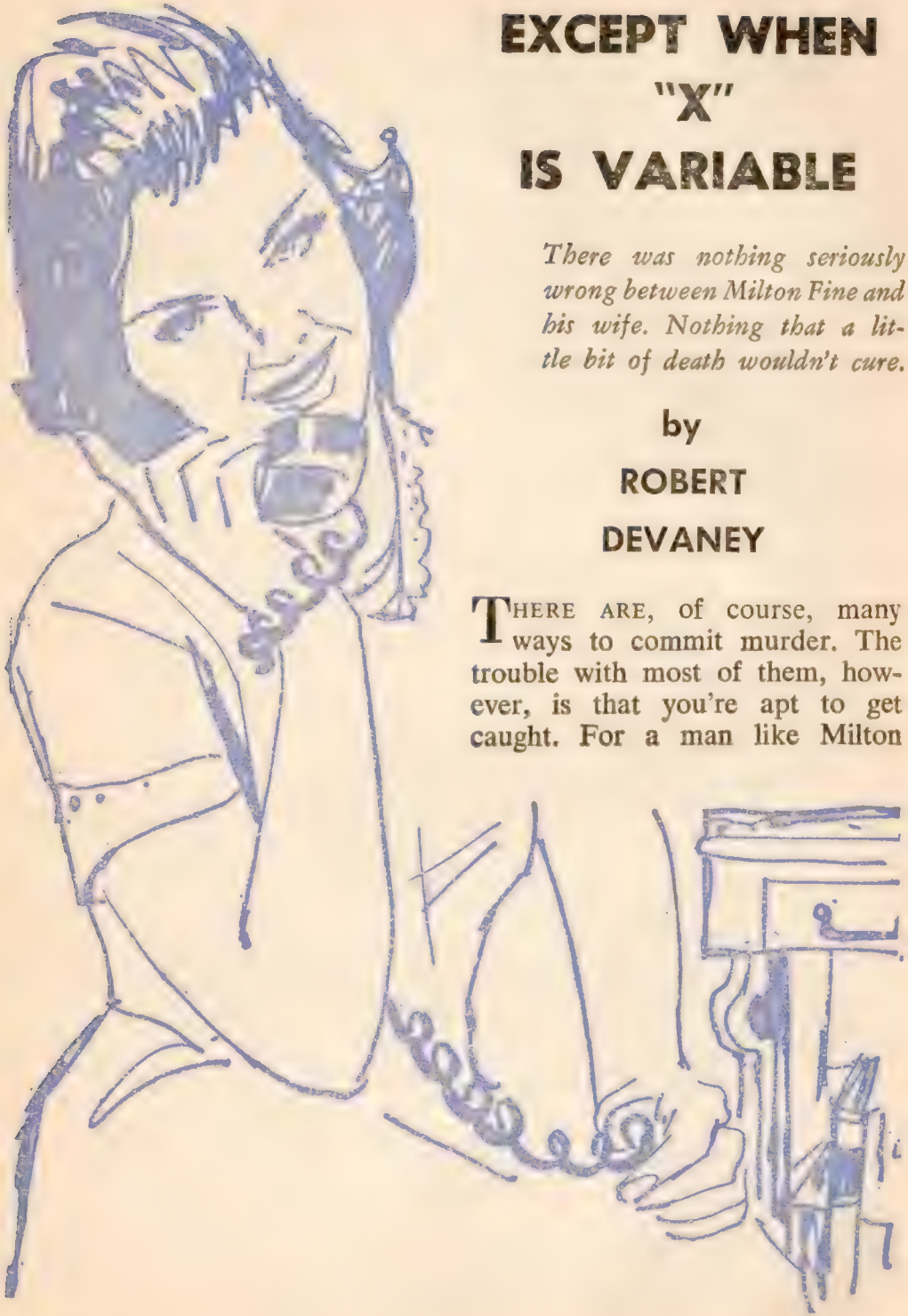
No. 3 . . . INSIDE JOB by Brett Halliday (June 1965)
It seemed to Shayne that the theft-and-murder trail lead both backwards and forwards; there was no pattern. So he decided that his route was a dangerously circular detour.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
56 WEST 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036

Please send me the three back copies of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. I enclose $1.00 in full payment. Remit by check, money order, or cash.

NAME .....
ADDRESS .....
CITY, ZONE, STATE .....

Please print **March—1967**



EXCEPT WHEN "X" IS VARIABLE

There was nothing seriously wrong between Milton Fine and his wife. Nothing that a little bit of death wouldn't cure.

by

ROBERT

DEVANEY

THERE ARE, of course, many ways to commit murder. The trouble with most of them, however, is that you're apt to get caught. For a man like Milton

Fine, who'd devoted a lifetime to the precise occupation of dealing with mathematical formulas, there could only be one way: the perfect way.

Milton could rival a computer in reaching a correct algebraic equation. Given a problem in human terms, however, Milton was lost.

Milton knew that the crisis now facing him could be solved, but it would first have to be broken down into a mathematical formula.

This was fairly simple: Factor X (a wife who was far too young and attractive for a bookish mathematics professor such as Milton) Factor Y (an equally young new addition to the math department, who doubled as coach of the varsity baseball team) had been observed by Factor Z (who, of course, was Milton, last in everything, by his very nature), in what would have been clearly visible as simple addition to even the most unlearned math student.

Milton rightly believed that X should not be added to Y, especially since X and Z were combined by law into a fixed equation.

Milton knew that several choices were open to him. He could close his eyes to what was going on around him and thereby allow the addition to take place naturally, thusly losing all sense of honor and self-respect.

He could decide to multiply a little on his own, but since it had taken him years to find X, Milton doubted if he'd be twice lucky in such a complicated problem as love.

He could also use division, and divorce X. However, disagreeable as she was, the thought of losing her completely was more painful to him than the present situation. The only solution, as Milton saw it, was to subtract Y.

Once the hypothetical solution had been reached, Milton knew that he'd have to test the theory. If Y, one muscular Brian Fellows, were removed from X, one unfaithful Sylvia Fine, would the end result be a reunion of X with Z?

And, if so, how does one remove Y from the equation without its absence being noticed? This was the problem which gave Milton most pause, for, unlike chalk figures, which could be erased from a blackboard with one swipe of an eraser, a baseball coach would put up a fight in which Milton would be no match.

If Milton's students began to think that his mind was on matters other than bisecting arcs and parallel lines, they would have been correct. Milton prided himself on the systematic and methodical manner in which he delivered lectures, but his mind began to slip to other subjects at very crucial moments.

One afternoon, as Milton displayed a large steel ball, etched with delicate lines to demonstrate the variations between circumferences and arcs, Milton was struck

with the similarity between that object and a baseball. This thought led him into speculation as to where Brian Fellows was at that moment, and what Milton might find if he were to suddenly leave his class room and head for home. By the time Milton was aware that the dismissal bell had sounded, half his class were filing out, staring quizzically at his surprised face.

On another occasion, shortly thereafter, when he had completed a particularly shoddy lecture, Milton was called into the department head's office for a "conference." His palms were damp and his collar itched against the back of his neck as he closed the door and tried to avert Dr. Weatherknox's eyes.

The good doctor was in rare form that afternoon. Milton could tell by the overly friendly smile that creased Weatherknox's face that the older man knew he was finally on to a way which would give him perfect justification for not renewing Milton's contract, and, thusly, cutting him off right before he reached tenure.

"Sit down, Milton," slid so smoothly out of Weatherknox's mouth that Milton had the distinct impression the words were dripping through the air and oozing across the floor, where they would harden around Milton's feet and bind him to the chair until Weatherknox had destroyed him completely.

"I have the feeling that we've been pushing you too hard, Milton," he said, knowing full well that Milton had been given the lightest course load of any of the professors in the department. Milton always believed this was done so he'd have no real chance to show what he could do with a gifted class of advanced math majors.

"A number of people, who shall remain nameless, of course, have told me that they've noticed signs of strain showing up in your lectures. It's been called to my attention that you might need a rest."

Milton wanted to protest, but Weatherknox was off again even before he could open his lips.

"I know that you're dedicated, Milton." Somehow the word sounded dirty in Weatherknox's mouth. "And I want to see you stay on here. This *is* your last year before the question of tenure comes up, isn't it?" He looked to Milton for a nod. Milton nodded.

"That's what I thought. Naturally if you were to take a leave of absence at such a crucial moment, the regents might question your stability."

Milton swore that Weatherknox's eyes were dancing, "So, what I've proposed, my boy, is that you represent the department at the All-State mathematics teachers' convention next week. Mrs. Weatherknox and I had planned to attend, but under the circumstances, I feel the trip might do

you and Mrs. Fine more good. What do you say, 'eh?" Weatherknox would slit his cheeks if he smiled any more broadly, Milton thought.

"I don't know, sir," he said, wiping his sponge-like hands onto his trousers. "I have my classes to give, and—"

"Nonsense," came the snorted reply, "we'll let Fellows take over for you for the week."

Milton's heart jumped at the sound of the name. Fellows! Old Weatherknox had been grooming Fellows for Milton's place for months, just as Sylvia was doing, in her way. Weatherknox would get rid of Milton and show the regents what Fellows could do all at the same time.

Milton glared into his opponent's ridiculously twinkling eyes and knew there wasn't a thing he could do. New figures had been added, Milton had been subtracted, and the total was already written on Weatherknox's face.

Milton sighed for a moment, looked at those leering eyes one more time, and asked when he would be expected to leave for the convention.

Twenty minutes later, all details had been ironed out. On Friday, Milton and Sylvia would be on their way to the All-State mathematics teachers' convention. He could already imagine Sylvia's reaction when he told her the exciting week he had planned for her.

Suddenly, in the moment just between the time in which Milton's hand left Weatherknox's and was about to touch the doorknob, the equation fell into place. In that instant, Milton no longer cared if he lost tenure, if Fellows replaced him, or if Weatherknox sent him to mathematics teachers' conventions for the rest of his life. Milton had found the way to subtract Y.

On the way home, Milton went over in his mind what he would tell Sylvia. It wasn't hard to think of dreary aspects connected with mathematics teachers' conventions, but Milton wanted to remember them all, and present them in such a manner that Sylvia would react in precisely the manner he hoped she would.

"I know it won't be fun for you, Syl," he coaxed, when at last he was reciting the little speech he'd memorized on the way home, "but we have to go." Her initial response had been encouraging, and as Milton went on, her contempt for the upcoming week grew even more vehement. "During the day there will be new-math lectures, and probably a number of papers will be delivered, giving the pros and cons of Dr. Graumach's findings in experimental trigonometry. At night, though, there will be dinners and several small get-together which will make the trip pleasant for you."

Milton smiled to himself as Sylvia's face contorted in distaste. "Of

course, even at these meetings we'll hear several addresses by heads of the various university departments." Milton would have laughed with glee if it wouldn't have given him away, "I shall find this most stimulating. Perhaps you will too, Syl. I've always wondered why you find mathematics so unexciting."

Sylvia fussed for a while, but in the end, she agreed to go. Milton could tell that her heart was not pounding with eagerness to be off to the convention, and he chose the appropriate moment to kiss her good night.

Undressed and lying in bed, Milton strained to hear the soft sound of dialing coming from the next room. When he felt that the phone had had sufficient time to ring and be answered—calculating in his mind the length of time between each ring and applying this to the median number of rings required for an average phone call—he picked up the bedroom extension and listened.

"And so the little creep wants to drag me away to some fool convention for a whole week. What am I going to do?"

"You'll go with him, that's what you'll do. And you'll like it."

"Brian, don't be a boor. Please, darling, it's so unlike you. How can I enjoy anything without you to share it with me?"

"Syl, I've told you that this just can't go on any longer. People are beginning to suspect things. I'm sure of it."

"Oh, no! You're not going to start that again, because it won't work. The only people *I* suspect are you and that new blonde in the English department, and I won't let you get away with that. Do you know what your career at this university would be worth if I told Milton what's going on? How you seduced me while he was away? How—"

"I seduced *you?*"

"That's what I'd tell him, lover. Unless you come up next week, I just might make up a few more lies about you."

"Syl, you know I can't come up. It's impossible."

"I know it's impossible to leave you here with her, that's what I know. You don't have a class on

Wednesday. Come up Tuesday night and stay over. Be with me."

"And what will we tell him? That I'm there for the convention too?"

"He won't see you. He'll never know. I'll play sick and get him out of the hotel. Then I'll call you and you can come over."

"Syl, it won't work."

"It will work, lover, because I'll make it work. I'll be damned if I'm going to rot away seven nights listening to what's equal to the sum of what."

"I can't persuade you?"

"No, you can't. You'd better come, too."

Milton waited until they'd said good-by, listened for the sound of Sylvia's wet mouth kissing the phone receiver, and only when he'd heard the two distinct clicks did he replace his receiver. He turned over on the bed and had to bury his head in the pillow to keep from laughing. X and Y could not be following Milton's formula more closely.

The convention would ordinarily have been a real high point for Milton, for he truly enjoyed them. In view of his more pressing concerns, however, this one seemed to drag by. Monday and Tuesday passed uneventfully.

On Wednesday afternoon, however, Sylvia developed a splitting headache, which grew worse as the afternoon wore on, until finally, when the time came for them to leave for the convention banquet, she begged Milton to let her stay in the hotel room and get some rest. Milton patted her hand in sympathy, and advised her to spend the entire evening in bed.

Milton went down to the lobby and phoned the banquet chairman. "Mrs. Larch? This is Milton Fine. I'm afraid Mrs. Fine and I are going to have to cancel out of the banquet this evening. My wife's developed a pretty troublesome headache and just doesn't feel up to it."

Milton listened for several moments to the sympathy that oozed from the other end of the telephone.

"No, nothing to really worry about. It'll pass. I'm going to stay home with her all night, though, just to make sure that she has everything she needs." Milton was extremely careful to emphasize that he would be in the hotel room with Sylvia for the entire night. The banquet chairman clucked some more words of regret, Milton expressed his hopes that the Fines would have better luck the next convention year, and they said good-by.

Milton was delighted at how beautifully his plot was working out. With the banquet chairman as his alibi, he could do what he'd planned to do in perfect safety. No need to worry about Sylvia telling anyone he was *not* with her, because if she did, she'd have to tell who was with her.

Milton knew that Sylvia valued her reputation far too much to expose herself to such a scandal. With a minimum of persuasion from Milton, Sylvia would say he'd been with her all evening, and Mrs. Larch and anyone else who asked after his whereabouts would swear to it. Milton was, after all, a man who did what he said he was going to do.

From a discreet position in the lobby, Milton calculated the time it would take for Brian to arrive. Two minutes for Sylvia to make sure that Milton had gone down in the elevator; one minute and fifteen seconds for her to call Brian; six minutes—give or take one minute either way—for him to leave his hotel and walk to theirs.

Milton bought a newspaper, and exactly nine minutes later, looked up to see Brian walking across the lobby toward the elevator.

"Early," Milton noted.

He then calculated another time chart, of a more delicate nature. Not knowing what went on while he was away, Milton was somewhat at a loss to compute how long this meeting between X and Y would last. He knew that Sylvia knew the convention would be over by ten o'clock, so they had two-and-a-half hours. Milton imagined that by nine forty-five, Brian would re-appear in the lobby.

He settled down with his newspaper again, expecting to reach the financial section before he'd have to leave it, but was completely surprised when, just into the amusements section, he looked up purely by chance and saw Brian going through the revolving doors to the street.

Milton dropped the paper and followed at a discreet distance. Several blocks north, off the main street, and one block east on the next cross street, Brian entered a small hotel.

Milton slipped quietly into the lobby and watched as the desk clerk handed Brian his key. Then he slipped outside again and waited. One and a half minutes for the elevator to arrive, then back into the lobby, where he stood at a book stall close to the registration desk and counted the mail boxes behind the desk clerk. Four up, eight over. Room 408. Milton walked to the elevator and rode to Brian Fellows' floor.

Brian was reluctant to let Milton into his room at first, but this had been anticipated.

"I've come to talk about Sylvia," he said softly, and the door opened

to admit him. "I think it's *time* we talked, don't you?" Milton said.

They did talk, for several minutes. Milton appeared hesitant at first, playing the role of the outraged, but resigned, husband to the hilt. Brian was surprisingly cool about his role, and this worried Milton slightly. He had imagined that the other man would act in two ways: either relieved to know that Milton knew at last and would now give Sylvia a divorce, or pretend that he had no part in Sylvia's extra-marital life.

Brian wasn't acting in either of these ways. He listened to Milton with polite indifference, as though he didn't care one way or another about Sylvia. That was merely a technicality, however, as far as Milton was concerned. It really didn't matter to him how Brian reacted. He would have liked to have seen the younger man feel that he'd completely destroyed Milton, but that was only frosting on the cake.

When the time came, and Brian had turned his back for a moment, Milton drew from his pocket the thin glove with the heavy steel demonstration ball inside, drew back his arm, and lowered the entire device with surprising force into the back of Brian's skull.

Milton chuckled to himself as the body crumpled to the floor.

"Bet you never caught a pitch like that before, did you, Coach?" he laughed softly. Milton let the ball slip out of the glove for a moment, and as he rolled it delicately in his palm, he imagined how astonished old Weatherknox would be if he had seen it.

With considerable effort, Milton lifted the body from the floor and dragged it into the bathroom. He dropped Brian's lifeless frame onto the cold tile, and began filling the bathtub with water.

In his mind, Milton calculated exactly how much water to run. Brian weighed approximately 175 pounds. Allowing for water displacement percentages the tub should be filled just slightly above the silver medallion in the porcelain.

As the steaming water poured out of the faucet, Milton quickly undressed the corpse. He knew that speed was of the essence. Allowing for a certain amount of stimulation from the heat of the water, Brian's blood would not stop flowing through the veins for another three minutes. When the body had been completely stripped, and the tub filled to exactly the right level, Milton struggled to lift Brian's legs over the tub wall and immerse him in the water.

It was a difficult task. Brian weighed more than Milton had imagined. Within moments, however, the lifeless arms and legs bobbed in the water. Milton arranged the head against the back of the tub in such a way that the initial fracture would seem to have

come from a collision with the hard porcelain of the tub's rim.

Milton then reached into his coat pocket and withdrew one of the razor blades from the pack he'd bought earlier in the evening. Lifting one of Brian's arms from the water, and turning it ever so slightly, so the wrist just skimmed the water-line, Milton worked with the precision which had made him first in his class in plane geometry.

The entire operation, from start to finish, took two minutes. When Milton was done, he made another quick calculation in his mind. Exactly seventeen minutes since Brian had left the hotel. Not quite the speed Milton had hoped for, but then, they had talked more than planned.

"It's over," Milton told himself as he walked back into his own hotel lobby.

"Poor Fellows," Weatherknox will say. "The strain must have been too much for him. Suicide! Milton, my boy, you'll take over all his classes, and we'll naturally want you to sign a new contract.

"I don't know how I could have been so wrong about that boy. Too much strain, I suppose. Took the only way out for people like that. Not like you, Milton. Steady as a rock, aren't you?" Milton wanted to sing out his happiness to the world.

No one would know that Z had subtracted Y. X might suspect something, but she'd never tell. It would cast suspicion on her more than Milton. Everyone knew what a mild-mannered person Milton was.

By the time the elevator reached his floor, Milton was calm, savoring his complete triumph. No one would ever connect him with Brian's death. No one but Milton even imagined that Sylvia and Brian knew each other. He was perfectly safe. The formula had been proven and found accurate.

Sylvia was in bed when he opened the door. Sound asleep, stretched out all over the sheets.

"Better not wake her just yet," Milton thought, "I'll undress in the dark."

He was just about to reach for his pajamas, when a knock came to the door. Milton hurried to open it, so the sound wouldn't wake Sylvia. Three policemen stood in the hall, and Milton's heart leaped into his throat.

"No," he thought quickly, "they couldn't have found him so soon."

"Yes?" he said timidly.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," the first policeman said, "but we got a call a while ago from a woman who said she heard a terrible fight going on in this room. Thought there might be some trouble."

"Trouble?" Milton said. "In *this* room?"

"Yes," the officer said. "This woman said she heard a violent argument, a woman screaming, and then nothing but silence. Her

husband didn't want her to get involved in it, but she finally convinced him that we should be called to look into it."

"There must be some mistake," Milton said. He swallowed hard, and felt his stomach churn. "My wife and I've been here all evening and there was no commotion here." Milton looked out of the corner of his eye at the bed, and for the first time since he'd entered the room, noticed the way Sylvia was lying there.

Not at all the way a person who was asleep would look, but very possibly the way a person who had been—

"Do you mind if we look around, sir?"

CORPSES ARE FOR KILLING by Michael Avallone

(Concluded from page 124)

excuse, got out, walked into the bushes and picked her off like she was some squirrel or deer. I can't think of anything more cold-blooded than that, can you?"

Jerome sighed. "Okay. It was like you said. But who the hell are you—God?"

He would never understand my answer but I gave it to him anyway.

"You just don't have the right to knock off anybody, Jerome. I hope the State gives you enough time to understand that before they burn you for killing your wife."

I got to Poughkeepsie a day later. After Jerome, after my deposition. After everything.

I don't bother picking up any more hitchhikers.

The ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month.

It was a real cool job. All it needed was a girl who wanted love and a guy who needed death. And now I had both . . .

BUYER'S MARKET

by H. C. NEAL

IT WAS the answer to a prayer, this day I ran across Danny Goodnight.

I'd been scouting for a boy to help me on this project, and Danny

filled the bill like ammo in the clip. I'd known him since the old days when we were together in the Army in Japan. We'd picked up our walk-around money by selling a little sugar here, cigarettes there, and maybe some penicillin some place else. He was an ideal market man, a tall good-looking kid with dark hair and an honest face. Clean-cut.

He's going to fit right into this project, and if I say so myself, it is a damn fine plan. Let me take a minute to lay it out for you—

While I was taking my last vacation up at Leavenworth (I drew five hard ones for breaking and entering and did them in twenty-seven months by keeping my head shut) I got the whole thing worked out.

First off, no more of this peanuts jazz, the nickel and dime burglary stuff. I want the big bundle, and I want it all in one sack. So where do you find it?

A loan office? Nix. Eight or nine hundred, at the most.

A supermart? Nix again. A few grand, if you're lucky. Not worth the risk.

A bank? Yeah! Yeah, but—

And that's a damned big "but."

There were some jerks there in the crossbar hotel who'd tried it. It's a sucker game on the face of it. I mean, you crack a crib, and boy, like lightning, every cop in the country is out for you. They're dying to get you before the FBI does. Shear professional jealousy. And the best driver in the world can't outrun that radio net. Look at my former roommates who were turning time in the barred-door resort because they'd tried it.

Every one of them had made at least one stupid little mistake. Poor preparation, bad timing, somebody blew up in the clutch, some kind of idiotic error. But then I got to thinking. It didn't have to be that way.

Now, if a brain guy got onto the thing, planned it right, ran the caper clean and crisp, kept his wits about him, and scratched out all the mistakes in advance—there's the go. A good score, nice and clean, and It don't matter how many cops are looking for you. Let them look right at you. The gimmick is, they don't know it's you.

I headed for Okie City as soon as I got sprung, and spent a week sight-seeing. Lots of new cribs. Chrome and glass and expensive stone. But tough. Too tough. All the tellers were up to their clavicles in alarm systems. Electronics, light beams, cameras, the whole bit.

To get myself some walkabout money, I hit a discount liquor store on a Friday night, and I am pleasantly surprised at the amount of scratch. A little over two grand. I am sitting in a smoky little tavern the next day trying to decide whether to go on down and check out Big D, or to head back north, when

I overhear some interesting conversation.

I wasn't aware of it, but it seems that just the day before, some guys have busted a crib in Dallas and pulled a very nice heist, all in all. Couple of the barflies in this place where I'm sitting are discussing the job, what with it being in all the papers, and one of them remarks that the quaint little bank where he lives would be a set-up for a job like that, if a man only had the guts to do it.

"Nah," jeers his beer buddy. "That little old bank ain't got no money in it."

"Shows your ignorance," the first talker rejoins. "On the fifth and twentieth of every month, the armored car leaves a lot of money there. It's to take care of the payroll checks from the air base."

This interests me more than a small bit, and by listening carefully I also learn that this little crib is in a small college town called Edmond, which is just north of Okie City. I further learn that, as far as these two gold bricks know, it doesn't have any alarm system, and, in fact, not even a guard.

It is a day or so later, while I am verifying all this that I run into Danny Goodnight, who is just what I need. I need myself a clean-cut youngster such as Danny to get himself a job as guard in that bank. There is a right way and several wrong ways to do anything. I have it figured that the rightest way to bust a crib is to have the guard working for me.

It develops that Danny is clean, has no cross-bar time of record, and is not only doing straight hard work, but intends to keep right on doing it.

I am beginning to wonder if this is the same Danny I knew before, when he hits me with the zinger—he is not a loner anymore. He has married some red-headed broad in Kansas City a year ago, and to hear him tell it, she is it. The last word.

I am thinking of dropping it right there, and then it comes to me that from what I know of red-headed broads, most of them have a touch of larceny in the heart. It might work out, at that.

"Where is she, Dan? I'd like to meet her?"

"She's over at the motel," he replied. "We ain't settled yet. We just blew into town, and I been looking for work."

"Let's go get some dinner," I suggest. "I want to meet this doll of yours."

He'd called it. This girl was some kind of pussy cat, all right. I've known a lot of broads, but this one was the one. She turned me on and wound me up the instant I laid on the orbs. I mean strong. Like a double-engine freight running downhill and late.

She has those long lovely racehorse legs, a waist your two hands would reach around, and a balcony

that goes beyond the wildest engineering theorems on anti-gravity. It puts a tight little knot in the pit of my gut just to watch her walk across the room. And that face—a properly prominent aquiline nose, eyes that went from green to gold-flecked to tawny, depending on what was in the coke and how much, and full nubile lips that were shaped just so and put there for the express purpose of uttering a two-word vocabulary—"take me."

All she said was, "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bolton," and I'd have sworn I heard the bedsprings creak. Her name was Amy, Amy Goodnight, (Lordy, how apt), and she looked hungry. For food, too. It was obvious that Danny, as good a boy as he was, just couldn't keep up with his homework.

I took them to a decent steakhouse out near the capitol, loosered them up with a big rib-eye, felt them out for a bit, and then laid it to them.

Danny was dubious, but Amy saw the light right away.

"For Crissake, honey!" she exclaimed, "What's to knocking yourself out on a pipeline crew for a lousy two bucks an hour? Where's it ever got us? If this is the way Fred says it is, there's no sweat. And twenty-five thousand dollars is a hell of a lot of money in my book."

I'd offered them a half share despite the fact that I was doing all the planning and most of the work. And her switch from "Mr. Bolton" to "Fred" without even changing gears had told me more than a ten-page letter.

"Gee, I just don't know," Danny protested. "Are you sure it will go that much, Fred?"

"Hell yes, Dan. That airbase has a big payroll in that little town."

He cracked his knuckles a moment longer, and sat looking at his hands. I could see him hating those callouses he'd gotten as part of his take-home pay on the pipeline job. Then he raised his head and grinned at me, just like the old Danny I'd soldiered with in Japan. "Okay, deal us in."

It wasn't too hard for him to talk himself into the guard job at the bank. Like I said, he was clean, an earnest young married man, and had the kind of build that looks great in a uniform. And the papers were still carrying reports on that earlier bank heist. That helped, too.

I slipped him the money to rent an apartment so he and Amy could "establish residence" in Edmond and buy himself a uniform. I bought him a .38 police positive, a box of ammo and some blanks. Then I went to the lake for a couple of days. Alone.

It was miserable. Every fish I caught had green eyes, red hair, and the damndest hips you ever saw.

And every time I rammed a hook into a piece of bait, I right

away got to thinking about something else.

Next night, they met me in Okie City for dinner and Danny was ready with his report. It was nice and spartan, complete, but not overdone. He had sketched the floor plan, spotting the teller windows, the safe, entries, etc. We repaired to my motel room and ran through it, checking the movements, the timing, sacking the loot, the tricky part and the getaway.

Then we held some more rehearsals. For the next three nights, through the nineteenth, they came down and we dressed it. I couldn't find any flies on it—and I was being critical as hell.

The next morning, the big morning, came clear and cool and at a quarter after nine Amy and I drove up and parked at the curb just down from the bank.

Amy buried her mug in a newspaper while I bent forward to check the little .32 automatic I'd bought. Holding it under the dash panel, I also glanced up and down the street checking for clearance. It looked good. I shoved the rod into my waistband and buttoned my jacket over it, patted my neat black wig into place, smoothed down my ersatz mustache, picked up the dimestore briefcase, winked at Amy and slid out.

If it came off as planned, I'd be back in exactly eight minutes and she'd have the horses purring.

I sauntered into the bank and

spotted Danny, standing precisely where he should be—near the first writing desk and about four feet away from the south wall, directly in front of the calendar.

I walked to the desk, laid my briefcase on it, fiddled with a deposit slip and shot him a sidewise glance. Receiving an almost imperceptible nod of reassurance, I stepped behind him, craning my neck at the calendar. I then casually unbottoned my jacket, snaked the automatic out, and jammed it into Danny's ribs.

"Freeze, sonny!" I barked, "and get 'em up!" He did.

I took his pistol from the holster, glared around at the startled employees and two customers in the room, and clued them in. "This is a holdup," I growled. "Nobody do anything silly, and you won't get hurt."

Not very original, but in a case like that, brevity is the winner. You got to get their attention. Fast.

There were two customers in the place, and the three men and five women who worked there, besides

Danny. The old duck at the first desk, obviously the president, had risen to his feet, looking slightly bewildered.

"Take it easy, mister," I told him. "Just do what I say and you won't get hurt." He froze. A wise old man.

At the next desk sat the vice president, probably the old fellow's son-in-law.

According to Danny, he was also the loan officer.

"Easy, junior," I cautioned him, "just take it slow." He did.

The rest of them, the cashier and the five dames, had sort of stepped back away from their cages and desks. And away from the gun, just as though they could back clear out of range. The two customers were rooted to the floor in round-eyed apprehension.

Calmness and obvious command on my part would keep the men under control. And I was prepared for the broads, too, even if they got yappy. Especially if they got yappy.

"Okay, punk," I instructed Danny. "Get that briefcase and come along with me. Remember, you're here to protect these people. Do exactly as I say and nobody gets hurt." I'd shoved his pistol into my coat pocket, keeping my own rod right in his ribs.

He glared at me quite properly, picked up the briefcase, and we went to work. Right down the teller cages in turn. All I had to do was gesture with the iron and the frightened jerks handed Danny the money out of each drawer.

"Put it in the case," I growled.

When we got to the end of the row, I motioned toward the rack of safety deposit boxes.

"What's that?" I asked, knowing, of course, exactly what it was.

"Those are safety deposit boxes," he replied, "we can't open up. It takes the owner's key, too."

"Skip it," I said. "What's in there?" gesturing toward the safe.

"That's the vault," he answered, "but there's nothing in it but records and books, ledgers and stuff." He reached casually toward one of the half-doors to close it.

I growled, "Let's look."

I'd herded all the people under my gun back to the corner in a group as Danny and I moved down the cages toward the rear. At this point, the pressure became too much for one of the broads. She let out a small yelp and took a breath for a bigger one.

Countering quickly, I plunged my free hand into my jacket pocket and grabbed a fistful of dry coffee I'd put there for just such a development, and flung it in her face. She spit and choked and kept quiet. When I pulled out the coffee, I also used two fingers around the barrel to bring out Danny's pistol, which I purposely let fall to the floor.

He bent toward it, and I jabbed him hard in the ribs with my cannon.

"Hold it, buster!" I rasped, "don't get cute." The audience ate it up.

We closed up to the safe and I tipped the door back with my foot. There it lay, the bundle. My God, but there were stacks of it! Thirty or forty thousand, at least! Bound up in fist-thick packets with rubber bands around—fives-tens-twenties. Four bundles of fifties and two packs of c-notes. What a score!

"Stuff it in the case," I commanded, "all of it."

He complied, sullenly and unwillingly, with a couple of "What the hell can I do?" looks for the benefit of his co-workers.

It was going just fine. A glance at my watch told me we were seven minutes into it. Right on the button.

Now came the tricky part.

I grabbed the case and, apparently forgetting about Danny's gun on the floor, waved him over to join the crowd while I backed away toward the door. Halfway to the front, I turned and started running, knowing that Danny would snatch up his cannon and start blasting. That's what the blank shells were for, three of them.

He did, and on the third one I lurched and clutched the side of my leg, squeezing the little ketchup bomb I'd taped to my thigh. It burst nicely, promptly oozing through the light slacks onto my fingers.

Very nice. Ten eye-witnesses saw Danny shoot the bad bank robber in the leg. In case anybody missed it, he yelled, "I got him!"

Then I played the ace, and you must realize this all takes much longer to tell than it did to execute.

I whirled, and while he was carefully squeezing off shot number three, I drilled the crouching Danny right between the eyes. I was expected to shoot him in the upper arm, but when I saw that the score was so much bigger than we thought, it came to me all of a sudden.

Wounded heroes have been known to talk a bit in their cups—stone dead bank guards hardly ever do. I'm not the kind of guy who'd make a date to meet a dame in the hotel lobby and then say, "You wait here. I'll run up and get the etchings."

Besides which, and this is probably the real reason I did it—I now had Amy, too. Beautiful Amy, the redhead with the racehorse legs. She was the one woman in the world who was worth it. Believe me, if she was the earth-mother of all trollops of all time, I still had to have her.

I fake-limped on out to the car for the benefit of the curious gawkers alerted by the gunfire and leaped in. By then, of course, she was waiting right in front of the door. A very cool pussy cat, indeed.

The get-gone was a piece of cake. We were out of town south in three minutes, driving fast but carefully, and began shedding. Off

came my wig and her blonde one, plus her sunshades. Then my mustache and jacket, while she doffed the sweater and skirt, leaving her clad in slacks and a shiny black blouse. Hardest thing for me to shuck was the "bloodstained" pair of slacks, but they came and I zippered into some charcoals.

Her blouse was made to be worn with only one button open. She undid the second one in preparation for the roadblock, which was right where we expected it to be, four miles down the road at an arterial highway intersection. Happily the state trooper manning the thing was young and studdy looking. He looked us over briefly, checked Amy's phony driver license, which had cost me a double sawbuck in an Okie City bar, then stared at me again.

Amy crossed her right arm over to the doortop, thrusting those magnificent, cloth-straining twins right at his nose, and he suddenly lost all interest in me. After another good look down the well of togetherness, he sighed and waved us on, not even noticing the mud I had carefully tossed-pasted onto the license plates the night before to blurry up the numbers.

Naturally, she wanted to know how it had gone, and I told her fine but I didn't tell her about Danny. Not yet.

We cut down a county road and changed the cheap car for a better one I'd bought and parked be-

side a creek early that morning with a fishing rod leaning against it. Funny thing. Someone had stolen my bass rod. Talk about the criminals in the big cities all you want, but there are plenty of thieves around small towns, too.

I weighted the sack of castoff clothing and stuff with a couple of building bricks I'd stashed in the new car and heaved the whole kit into the deep pool of the creek where it promptly sank.

We drove, then, on over to the expressway and like any respectable good-looking vacationing couple, down to a motel on the south side of Okie City, registered, got ourselves safely locked and shaded away into our room, and counted the bundle, the whole $71,642 of it.

I knew it from the beginning, of course. Sometimes a thing like that strikes a spark. When it does be-

tween a man and a woman, words only get in the way.

We were the damned, lost ones. We'd die a little and live a lot and in between there were no commandments, no laws, except those of the flesh and the senses, and while they lasted, they were more than enough.

We were a well matched pair. We ought to be—the devil had done the matching.

There wasn't any nice way to do it, so I told her straight out, while she was still giggling and hugging the green stuff.

"I killed Danny," I said flatly.

She stopped giggling and looked me. Not at me, just looked me. Straight and hard for a long time, and then she said it.

"I had a feeling you would. I guess I knew it from the start."

She said it with all the tenderness of a hit-and-run driver.

So I knew I had her. We were in it now, in it together and up to our jugulars in a briefly nasty business. Murder. It's only a word. I murmured it softly about a hundred times, and like any other word it by then meant nothing. Utterly nothing.

I'd stashed a fifth of Jack Daniels black in the car, and after checking for clearance I stepped out and got it. I poured us each a stiffer on the rocks and after she took a couple of sips, I began right away collecting the interest on my holdings.

The rainbow's end, the golden fleece, the eighth wonder of the world, and the seven fabled cities of Cibola.

And all of it mine.

Later that night, much later, we got ourselves out of there while the cops were still hunting a blonde and a wounded gunsel, driving east. We loafed it over to the coast in four days, sold the heap to a thief of a used car dealer, and caught a liner for Majorca.

It was tremendous while it lasted. We threw away the calendar, slept late, ate good, and spent much time lying on the sand in the sun, drinking wine from a goatskin bag. It was the life dream of a high school junior, that age in which the sheerest concept of heaven is an unhooked bra.

Away deep in the back of my mind, I suppose I knew that it had to end sometime. The fire burned out and the money ran out, just about simultaneously, which isn't bad timing.

We split our last grand and she headed for Paris, where it stands to reason that even with that kind of competition, she shouldn't do bad at all.

I chased the sun and here I am, older and no wiser, maybe, but what a memory bank. All in all, it was one hell of an experience, but it's over and done with now, so let's get down to business.

There's an old bank in Alexville, just crying to be knocked over . . .

(Continued from Other Side)

7 Perry Mason Bafflers

PLUS 2 MORE NEW MYSTERIES [worth $33.40 in publ. editions] ALL FOR ONLY $1.00

The Case of the BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR
The Case of the Troubled Trustee
The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS
The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE
The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE
The Case of the Amorous Aunt

HERE'S the treat of the year for Perry Mason fans! Tense courtroom battles, spellbinding action, baffling clues. Imagine getting *six* of Erle Stanley Gardner's best Perry Mason thrillers — in six full-size, hard-bound books. Then you get a *seventh* Perry Mason (his latest case!) — PLUS 2 MORE new full-length mysteries — in a big Triple Volume. These nine mysteries would cost $33.40 in the publishers' original editions—but YOU get them ALL for $1.00 as your introduction to the many advantages of membership in The Detective Book Club.

"Cream" of New Mysteries for LESS than 97¢ EACH

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" — by outstanding authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, A. A. Fair, Mignon G. Eberhart, John Creasey, and Van Wyck Mason. ALL THESE and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsomely bound Triple Volume (a $10.50 to $11.95 value in publishers' editions) for ONLY $2.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. NO money in advance; NO membership fee. You may cancel membership at any time.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Postcard for ALL 7 Volumes

Simply mail postcard promptly and we will send you at once the *SEVEN* complete Perry Mason thrillers (including his *latest* case) — PLUS TWO MORE exciting mysteries described on the other side. But don't delay. Mail postcard NOW to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR NINE MYSTERIES

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL THIS POSTCARD 10-293

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB **7-XC**
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once the SIX full-length hard-bound editions of Perry Mason thrillers, PLUS the brand-new 3-in-1 volume Club selection containing the latest Perry Mason and 2 other great mysteries. I enclose NO MONEY IN ADVANCE; within a week after receiving my books. I will either return them all and owe nothing, or keep ALL SEVEN volumes, containing NINE first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of ONLY $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charges).

As a member. I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future Triple Volume I decide to keep, I will send you only $2.89 (plus a few cents mailing charges). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership at any time. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

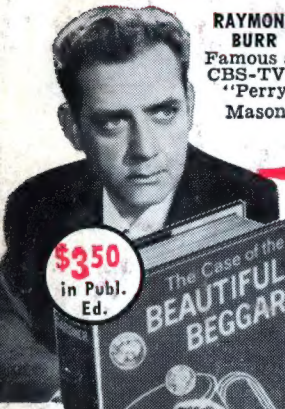
Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss } (Please Print Plainly)

Address.....

City.....State..... ZIP CODE ZONE NO.

MURDER SUSPENSE PERRY MASON GARDNER

Erle Stanley



RAYMOND BURR
Famous as CBS-TV's "Perry Mason"

9 Thrilling Mysteries for only $1.00 (as a new member)

Get 6 great PERRY MASONS in 6 full-length, hard-bound books

Plus the latest PERRY MASON and 2 more new mysteries in this big "3-in-1" volume

❶ **The Case of the BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR**
Perry agrees to help a *lovely girl* — who turns out to be a cunning *murderess.*

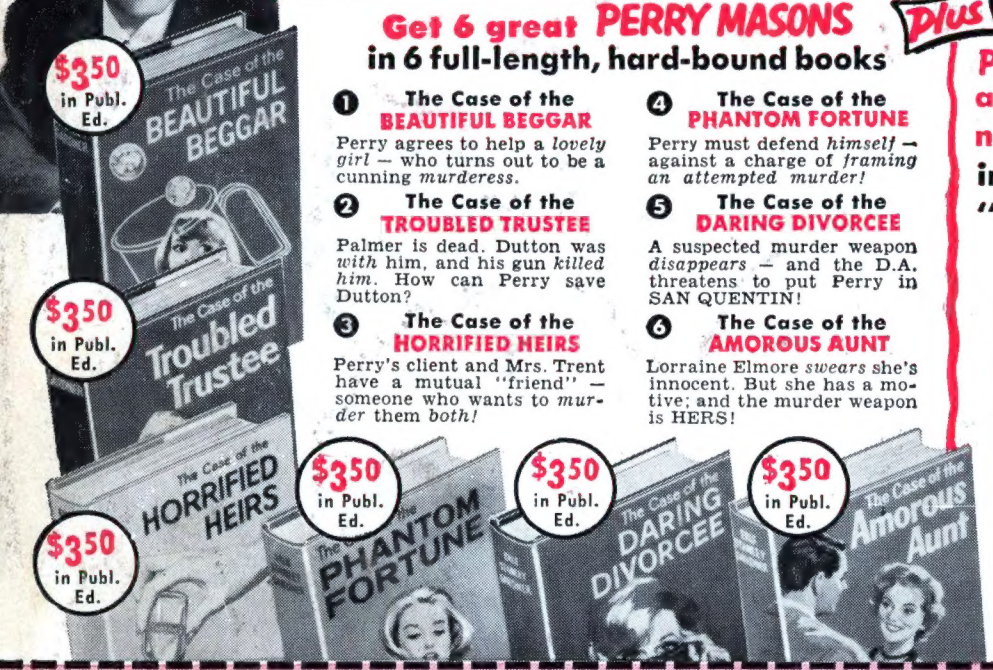
❷ **The Case of the TROUBLED TRUSTEE**
Palmer is dead. Dutton was *with* him, and his gun *killed him.* How can Perry save Dutton?

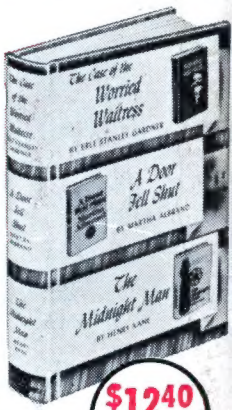
❸ **The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS**
Perry's client and Mrs. Trent have a mutual "friend" — someone who wants to *murder* them *both!*

❹ **The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE**
Perry must defend *himself* — against a charge of *framing an attempted murder!*

❺ **The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE**
A suspected murder weapon *disappears* — and the D.A. threatens to put Perry in SAN QUENTIN!

❻ **The Case of the AMOROUS AUNT**
Lorraine Elmore *swears* she's innocent. But she has a motive; and the murder weapon is HERS!


$3.50 in Publ. Ed.
The Case of the BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR
$3.50 in Publ. Ed.
The Case of the Troubled Trustee
$3.50 in Publ. Ed.
The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS
$3.50 in Publ. Ed.
The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE
$3.50 in Publ. Ed.
The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE
$3.50 in Publ. Ed.
The Case of the Amorous Aunt



$12.40 in Publ. Eds.

❼ **The Case of the WORRIED WAITRESS by Erle Stanley Gardner**
How can Perry win *this* case? His star witness is BLIND!

❽ **A DOOR FELL SHUT by Martha Albrand**
A concert violinist runs into MURDER in *East Berlin.*

❾ **THE MIDNIGHT MAN by Henry Kane**
An ex-cop tangles with big-time hoods — and MURDER!

(Continued on Other Side)

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
Roslyn, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
No postage stamp necessary if mailed in the United States

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York 11576